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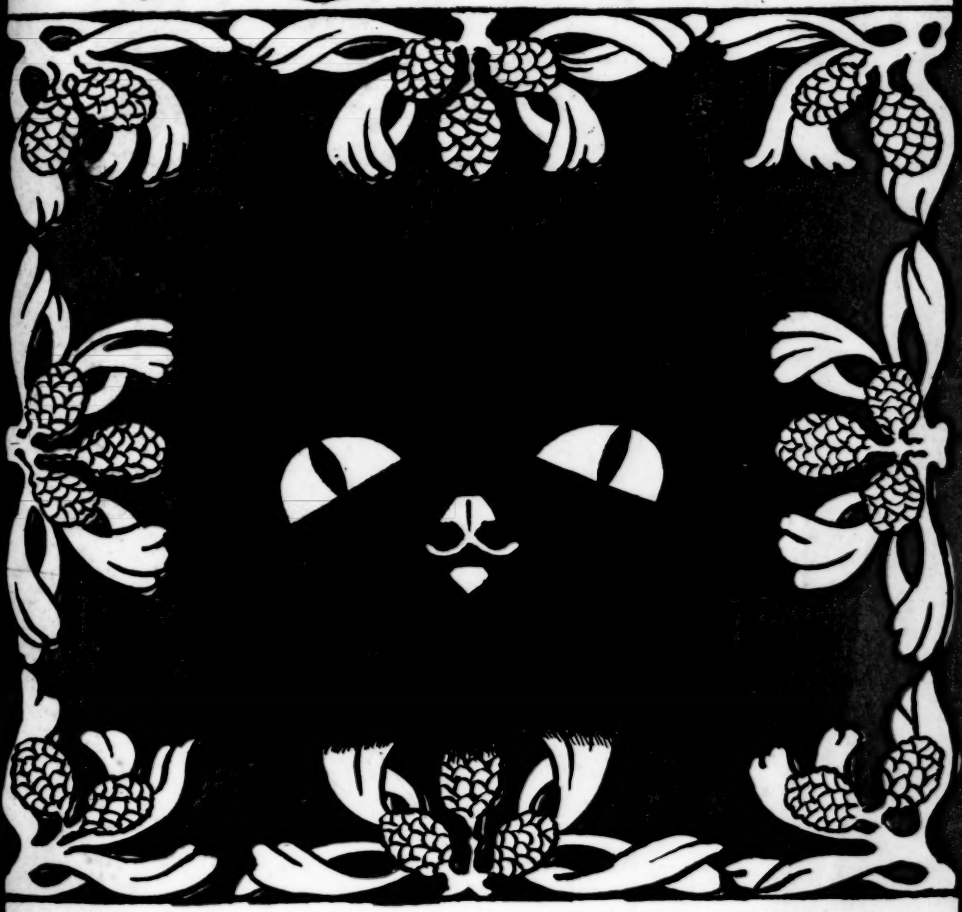

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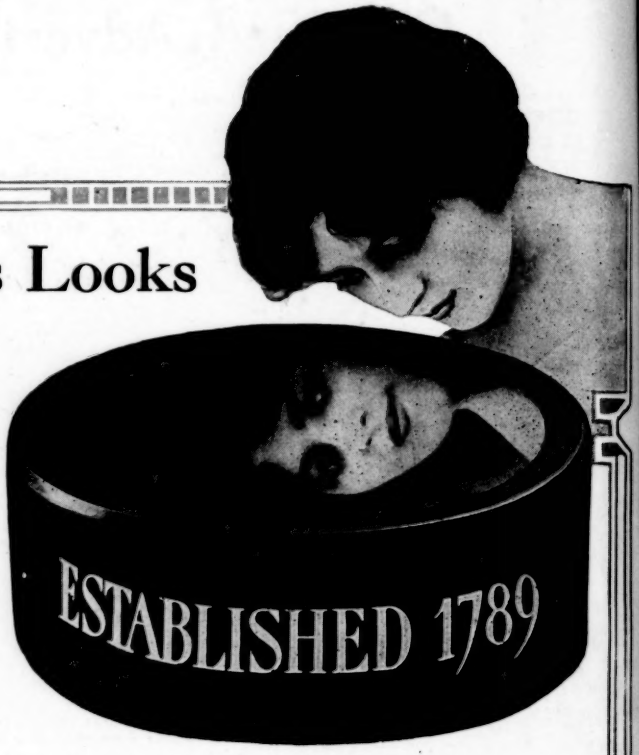

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The Black Cat

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The Mystery of 40 Ranelagh Terrace*

BY S. C. M. FISHER

LL see you in a day or so and I'll show you a new side of old London. Until then, good-bye."

My hand was crushed in the tremendous grip of Edmiston as he swung to the station platform at Oxford. His white teeth flashed in a frank smile as he waved a final farewell. I found myself in ready warmth responding to the cheerfulness and spontaneity of the boy—for he was no more—although he had his degree and had put in one year as interne at the Hospital for Orthopedic Cases at Chelsea. In spite of his lightness and buoyancy he seemed to have taken his profession seriously. In fact, I discovered during that ride from Liverpool that the branch pertaining to orthopedic treatment was with him a passion. He deplored again and again his inabilty to go on the Continent where in one of the scientific centers, Vienna, I think he said, most startling cures were being performed, even in the cases of adults, through manipulation and electricity, by one Dr. Ritz.

"I have a sister," he had added with a note of tenderness, "the most beautiful creature I know, so beautiful that her lameness is like a flaw in an otherwise priceless jewel. While my father lived, he firmly opposed all suggestions of treatment—my mother died while undergoing a surgical operation, and his wrath and bitterness

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against all methods of surgery could never be overcome. But it is my dream to take my sister to Vienna. My great fear is that Dr. Ritz may die or be out of reach by the time I am ready to go."

He had gazed out of the window moodily. I knew from a chance remark that it was a matter of means only which stood between him and his great desire. In a few minutes his natural buoyancy had asserted itself and he was in the midst of a tale of a daring prank which he and his fellow students had played on the faculty of his university, and until we reached Oxford he had entertained me with his youthful escapades, some of them so bold it was only by the margin of a hair's breadth that he had not been expelled. Always he was the leader, and I could not but admire his fine nerve and imagination though he showed, perhaps, a lack of the finer sensibilities.

Although our acquaintance dated only from the time he entered the railway carriage at Liverpool, where I was already installed, I felt a distinct sense of regret as we parted at Oxford, where he intended to stop over and I to go on to London. I hoped he would look me up as he had promised, for London with such a guide should prove an interesting experience.

The train began to move and I was about to settle myself comfortably again, when my eye was attracted by the light glancing on some object on the opposite seat. I leaned over and picked up a small latch key. It had evidently slipped from Edmiston's pocket. I sprang to the window hoping I might be able to throw the key to him, but though the train was only leaving the platform, he was no where in sight.

I examined the key with some curiosity, for it was a neat bit of steel, and looked quite un-English. Indeed it was very much like the Yale key, so common and popular in the States. Attached to it was a small disc with the inscription, A.M.E., 40 Ranelagh Terrace.

Well, I would soon be able to return it. I settled myself again at the window, interested to see how unchanged was the country since I had, with my tutor, tramped through it seven years before. We were gliding into Paddington before I realized it. A highly modern taxi took me to the new "Cyril" on the embankment.

The next day I paid a visit to Sir Henry Chichester, whom I had come to consult on an important matter for my firm. It was a rather difficult piece of business and I was naturally anxious to discharge it creditably, for it was a distinct mark of confidence to

entrust the affair with me, the youngest member of the firm.

Having spent an hour in consultation, and making an appointment for the following morning, I found it was well on in the afternoon. I thought of Edmiston and the key, and decided to call upon him at his office. I searched for his card and was disappointed to find no address upon it. I looked at the key. Without doubt, the address upon it would be that of his home. No. 40 Ranelagh Terrace was some distance away, but as I had nothing pressing to attend to, I decided to take the underground to Setham and make the rest of the distance by taxi.

I had no difficulty in finding the place. Ranelagh Terrace was like hundreds of other terraces in London, dull, monotonous and respectable. There is none of the open friendliness one sees in our own many windowed houses. Here each house stares resolutely ahead, ostentatiously ignoring its neighbor, effectively discouraging all interest or curiosity. I can well believe the story of two brothers who had been separated when small children, living for twenty years in such a row without discovering their relationship.

No 40 proved to be at the end of the terrace. I dismissed the taxi and rang the bell. I heard it echo some place below stairs but no one came to the door. I rang again. As I waited, I examined idly the side lights of the entrance. The silk curtain of one of these had evidently been caught back by some object inside. The slight irregularity attracted my attention.

Suddenly I brought myself up with a start, as I realized I had been staring into the house, where, beyond the hall, I was certain I had made out the form of a white hand and arm of some one lying on a couch. Again I pulled the bell, but there was no response, and, somewhat annoyed, I departed.

I was quite certain I should hear from Edmiston during the day and left a message with the key in case he should call while I was transacting my business with Sir Henry Chichester. However, when I returned, I found the key had not been delivered.

The incident of the day before recurred persistently to my mind. Was the person on the couch ill and unable to summon anyone, or alone, as was more probable, and unable or unwilling to come to the door? And had she, for I was sure the shapely arm was that of a woman, watched me as I stared into the room? The thought made me most uncomfortable and filled me with a desire to explain.

There were many things I had planned to do during my stay in England—some old friends I wished to see, one or two country

places I had promised to visit—but I felt a strange interest in my new acquaintance, Edmiston, and the slight mystery of the house, and my desire to return the key resulted in my determination to call again and leave at least a message with the servant.

Ranelagh Terrace looked lonelier and sterner than before as I approached it in a fine drizzle. I pulled the bell and observed, as I had before, the curtain pulled back, though today I avoided a too close scrutiny of it.

Again I waited, and not a sound disturbed the damp stillness of the place. I rang again, a third and fourth time, then I deliberately approached the lifted curtain and looked into the room. The light was dimmer than it had been the day before, but I could not be deceived. Beyond the long hall, through the open door, I could see the couch with a quiet figure extended upon it. It was a most extraordinary thing—that still form lying alone in the house. What should I do? I felt an appeal to the neighbors would be useless, and I would place myself in an equivocal position. As I turned irresolutely from the door, I met the scowling glance of a serving woman in the area window of the house adjoining, which I had thought unoccupied.

I ran down the steps to the house, hoping the woman could throw some light on the situation, but my efforts were met with the same puzzling silence. I was baffled, annoyed, and vaguely apprehensive.

It was in a confused state of mind that I returned to my hotel. I devoutly hoped there would be some word from Edmiston. As he might appear at any moment, I was loath to take any step in the matter. I found myself constantly thinking of the woman lying alone in the deserted house, of the strange behavior of the servant next door, and I was filled with anxiety and responsibility to such an extent that it was with difficulty I brought my mind to bear upon the important business that had brought me to England.

The next morning, after a wretched night, I finished my interview with Sir Henry and hastened back to the hotel. Edmiston had not called, but there was a note from him, dated from Oxford, regretting his delay and saying he hoped to be in London the next morning. I threw the note impatiently on the table. How unfortunate this delay! Had some tragedy taken place in his home during his absence, of which he was calmly unaware? Should I notify the police?

I was now obsessed by the problem, and made up my mind to visit the house again. I mounted the steps and pulled the bell with

a sense of suppressed excitement, for I had made up my mind to a definite step. There was the same silence when the faint jangle had died away. Twice I rang. I could see the quiet form lying as it had before. I hesitated a moment, then inserted the key, turned the lock, and stepped into the house. My nerves were tense, for I knew not what to expect. I stood rigid and looked toward the couch. Lying there was a woman, apparently in natural, easy repose. I felt guilty of intrusion, yet knew I was justified by the circumstances and by my interest in Edmiston.

I drew nearer with beating heart, and something gripped my very soul as I looked upon the extraordinary beauty of the upturned face. I had feared some gruesome object of accident or crime, and the shock of seeing instead, this beautiful girl, apparently in sleep, held me motionless for some length. She could not be more than twenty years of age. The contour of her face was soft and delicate as a child's while her silky hair formed an aureole of light that shone like sunshine in the somber room.

I dropped to my knees and took the slender hand in my own, and felt with inexpressible relief the regular beating of the pulse. I tried gently to arouse her, but soon desisted as I realized the danger of awakening her to the presence of a total stranger. With an effort I drew myself away and began an examination of the house. The sudden illness or possible death of someone in charge might account in part for the mystery. But though I visited the kitchen and sculleries below and the drawing-rooms and bedrooms above, there was not another creature in the strange place.

I sank into a chair, in the deepest perplexity. Now that I knew the lonely occupant of the house was in no immediate danger, I was loath to bring any curious stranger into the case and determined to do nothing until the return of Edmiston, who in all probability would be back on the following day.

Drawing the fur rug closer about the lovely form of the girl, I reluctantly left the house, taking the precaution to straighten the curtain of the hall window. I could not bear the thought of some profane eye, viewing as I had done, that helpless girl.

Once at the hotel I could not rest, nor could I bring myself to find distraction in the theaters. I paced restlessly through my rooms, in imagination seeing that young girl awakening to the loneliness of the deserted house, frightened, terrified, alone. By midnight I had so allowed the mental picture to distress me that I threw on my overcoat, ordered a taxi, and made my way to Ranelagh

Terrace. Absolute silence lay like a blanket over the place. Not a footstep, not a closing door disturbed the night. I shall never forget that lonely vigil. Though I have spent a night in the forests of the Rocky Mountains, lost from a hunting party, and have slept in a rancher's cabin on the horizonless prairies of the Dakotas, the sense of isolation was not so complete as here with the beating hearts of London's millions around me.

After the feverish anxiety of the early part of the night there was a comforting sense of relief to stand guard at the door behind which lay the girl I found myself loving with a passion at once tender and reverent. Mentally I pressed the slender hands to my lips and placed them, like pure petals of a rose, on her breast. I left as the first dingy streaks of dawn crept through the thick atmosphere, and rather worn reached my rooms and threw myself on my bed.

It was nine o'clock when I awoke. I ordered breakfast to be served in my room, hurried through a cold bath, and dressed. I was torn by a thousand anxieties and fears. I started at every sound, hoping to see Edmiston. I felt I could do nothing until I saw him and hoped to Heaven he would come early. Fortunately, I had not long to wait in this state of mind. I had just pushed aside the untouched breakfast when he was announced. With outstretched, eager hands I sprang to the door to meet him. Edmiston came into the room, turned to see that the door was closed, and, ignoring my proffered hand, stood and looked at me with a hostile expression. That he was laboring under strong excitement I could see. The boyish air was gone, and in place of the open friendliness he had before shown me he stood there in a threatening attitude.

I drew back at the repulse, but in an instant cried out, as fear clutched my heart, "For Heaven's sake, Edmiston, tell me what has happened!"

"You do that well," he replied with a sneer, "but clever acting can't overcome direct evidence."

"What are you talking about? Acting—evidence! Are you mad, Edmiston, or is this one of those pieces of deviltry you were so fond of perpetrating at college? You have been home—you have seen—"

"Yes, I came back this morning, to find my house ransacked from kitchen to garret, and everything of value taken including a considerable sum of money."

I dropped into a chair, overcome by the news, sick with dread.

The question struggling to my lips I dared not ask. My collapse seemed to surprise, to disconcert Edmiston. He hesitated, but for a moment only.

"The house was entered from the street door," he continued, "by someone using a latch key—I had lost mine, undoubtedly on the train, you must have—"

"Yes, yes," I interrupted impatiently. "I found it of course, but —but— your sister, Edmiston?"

"My sister has been with me for the last three days and is quite well," he replied dryly. "Your mind seems to be wandering."

"My mind wandering! I must be stark, raving mad! For three days I have seen your sister, lying unconscious, alone in your house! For God's sake, Edmiston, if this is a joke, stop it, and tell me what it all means."

"It means, my clever American friend, that I have lost everything of value that I possessed, through someone who entered my house last night, and it means that unless the amount of one thousand pounds is forthcoming within the next thirty minutes, the facts will be given to the police— the circumstance of the lost key; the number of the driver who, past midnight, deposited a certain passenger at a certain number beyond Setham; the name of a serving woman, who, on several different occasions, watched the peculiar movements of a person, unmistakably American. A fairly complete chain of evidence, I think you will admit."

I brought my bewildered faculties together by a supreme effort of will. Here I was caught in a pretty net of circumstantial evidence. Had I been the easy dupe, like a country bumpkin, of a common confidence game? Could this fresh-faced boy be a practised blackmailer, and the beautiful girl, his tool? I could not suppress a groan at the thought. My whole soul protested at such a possibility. Pain and rage brought me to my feet.

"Do you think I am the easy prey of a common trap like this? I know your kind and your methods. Your bluff, my young friend, won't work. Take your evidence to the police. You will have to prove it is not your own well-laid trap. I can summon some pretty influential persons to attest to my character."

He remained unmoved by my words.

"Very well," he answered quietly. "I was willing to let you out of a difficult situation as easily as possible. All I desire is to recover my loss. I believed no one but you could have entered the house, but if you are the victim of some remarkable coincidence, it will no

doubt come out in the trial. I regret the detention and notoriety it will entail, but as you say, you have influential friends. There is Sir Henry Chichester—"

"Sir Henry Chichester be damned!" I interrupted him, in a fury. "You know, for I remember telling you, that I had never met him until I came over here on a business matter for my firm and you know that I would rather lose the sum you are trying to extort from me, a dozen times over, than have him lose his confidence in me and my firm at this time."

I raged like a caged animal as I realized in what an unpleasant light I would be placed if Edmiston persisted in calling in the police. Even though I proved myself the victim of a blackmailing plot, I would at the same time prove myself several different kinds of an ass to have fallen so easily into the trap, and the influence that I believed I had enlisted from Sir Henry would be withdrawn with dignity.

I wanted to beat the boy who had proven himself so clever. I ached with a desire to kick him out of the room, to get some relief in physical action, but I knew I must deal calmly, that I was in a serious difficulty. Had I myself only to consider, I would have taken a certain pleasure in calling his bluff, in defying him to summon the police and prove his case, but I would not, for all I possessed, fail Rollins and Herbert, who had sent me here, and ruin their long cherished plan for this English connection.

I was sunk in miserable reflection, when I was roused by a sharp metallic sound as Edmiston closed his watch.

"It lacks just four minutes of the half hour," he said slowly. "I thought I would remind you."

I ground my teeth and walked to my desk. "Don't think for one moment I am deceived, or that this is the end of the matter. For certain reasons which you understand only too well, I will submit to this preposterous blackmail, but I give you fair warning, that when I have finished my business, if there are any brains in Scotland Yard, I'll find you and have my revenge."

"Very well, I'll take the risk," he replied coolly.

"And now, get out!" I ordered, as I pushed a draft toward him. "Go! Before I kick you out like the unclean rat you are!"

There was no haste in his movements as he came over and picked up the draft. He studied it a moment, then looked at me and laughed. There was a queer note in his voice and to my surprise, instead of turning to the door, he sank into a chair.

"By jove, upon my word!" he muttered, "No wonder there are criminals when it is so easy! Upon my word!"

I stared at the man, convinced he had lost his wits.

"I'm awfully sorry, old chap. It was deuced rough and I apologize. I hope there won't be any hard feeling over it. It was a wager, you see. I saw Percy Delafield at Oxford. Percy and I were in the same form at Tunbridge and later went through college together, where we shared equally the responsibility of making life interesting for the good old doctors there. We dined together, that night at Oxford, and reviewed with a good deal of relish some of our most artistic efforts. During the evening I happened to speak of you and of losing my key, which I knew I must have left in the carriage."

" 'If only it had been your purse or a case of specimens, what a chance for a ripping joke on the American!' Percy said."

"By jove!" I boasted, "with nothing but that key to go on, I could turn a blackmailing trick for a thousand pounds!"

" 'I'll wager a thousand against your medical library, you can't!' Percy cried, and—well— that's the way it started—and, by jove, I've got his thousand pounds!"

I listened to Edmiston with mingled feelings. One moment I wanted to pound him properly for the mental distress he had caused me, the next I could have embraced him for the relief I felt to learn that the brother of the girl I loved, was no criminal. My relief, however, soon gave way to a new cause for anger and indignation.

"And for a wager," I flung at him, "you would use your sister—place her in—"

"Don't," he cried, wincing at my words, "don't think I would have done it if there had been any other way. You see I knew you and— that thousand pounds will take us to Vienna." He looked at me appealingly, with flushed face.

"But," I objected, "to leave her alone, unprotected, and drugged!"

"Not alone, old Margaret was never far away—you saw her once—the two houses are connected. Indeed it was from the adjoining house, where I have an improvised laboratory, that I saw you the first time you called. I watched you, wondering why your ring was not answered. I saw you start as you realized you had been staring into the house where my sister way lying asleep, and on the instant there flashed into my mind a plan for winning my wager with Percy. It was easy to find out when you left your hotel. I

gave my sister, as I have given her once or twice when she has been in pain, a small dose of morphine. I would rather not have used her, but there was so much at stake—for her. I had to sacrifice you both a little. It was deuced cheek in your case, but I hope you'll feel you can forgive me." He held out his hand.

"You clever rascal," I replied, "to work up a case like this with nothing to start from but a lost key. I'll forgive you, because I need you. I've lost something myself—at No. 40 Ranelagh Terrace!"

The Gringo*

BY ADA BROWN TALBOT

HERE was little of beauty about the adobe house known as Casa Ybarra. It had long been closed and, since revolution had stalked forth throughout the land, it had been pillaged until little but the shell remained. It was the casa grande, principal house on the splendid Hacienda Ybarra, whose master, like most superlatively rich Mexicans, chose to live in his country's capital.

The hacienda, boasting half a million acres, had its being in the arid region of a state in northwestern Mexico. Barren, forbidding, hot in the dazzling semi-tropical sun, the yellow sandy soil, with its outcropping patches of alkali, blurs of bunch grass, and scattered bowlders of lava stone, stretched away in undulating waves to the fringe of craggy mountain range that formed a barrier to the outer world.

Now, however, the glare was softened; long rays from the setting sun tinged with rose light the adobe walls of the silent house. Before the man in the tiny lookout tower realized it, daylight had fled and the short twilight of that latitude had given place to night. The sky almost as suddenly burst into bloom with a myriad stars that shone with the brilliancy known in desert lands.

The man in the tower, a slender youth, crept noiselessly down to the patio and waited, he hardly knew for what. Rather was it inaction after extreme activity. The starlight revealed in the patio the toll of a day's fighting. Piled about him in gruesome disorder were human bodies, silent, ghastly. He was glad he could not see the faces; yet, almost without his own volition, his eyes searched the shadows for a familiar form.

A groan broke the silence and startled him as the report of a pistol would have done. But there was a familiar tone in the voice and there was life in that huddle of human forms. The man knew now he was not alone.

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"Señor Forrester, Señor Forrester," came the voice, scarcely audible even in the silence.

"I am here, near you, Felipe," the American replied eagerly.

In another moment Felipe, the Mexican, was in the tall gringo's arms and was being carried to the center of the patio, to the side of what once had been a fountain. It, too, was silent now, but there was water in its cracked basin.

Forrester, the gringo, bathed the Mexican's face in the cool water and gave him stimulant from his own flask. He knew there was only a spark of life left, but even that was precious companionship.

"What is it you wish to say, Felipe?" he asked again and again. The Mexican's efforts to speak were pitiable; at last they were rewarded. He raised himself with sudden, miraculous strength and held out his watch, a simple silver affair.

"Take this, Señor Forrester," he gasped. "Send it to my mother. Please do not forget." Then with sudden inspiration his voice rose, strong for a moment in the last flicker of the flame.

"Ah, but they may kill you when they return tomorrow, Señor—the federals!"

"Will they return, Felipe?" the gringo asked, listlessly. His brain seemed benumbed. It had not occurred to him that the federals might revisit the scene. He placed the watch mechanically in his pocket.

"Yes, Señor, you are an American, a gringo, fighting with us—with rebels. What can you expect? *They will return.* You are alone; you must die. If you were a Mexican it would be the same. You are a rebel and you—are—alone!"

"I can go—while it is dark; I can escape them, Felipe." Forrester was eager now, with an awakened sense of his danger.

"No, do not try that, Señor Forrester," the boy pleaded. "Some one will see. They leave some one to watch, to guard, in the valley, over yonder. You—cannot—"

The words became an inarticulate murmur. Felipe fell back among the shadows once more. "Adios," he whispered. The labored breathing ceased, and the gringo was indeed alone.

The moon had risen and was peeping over the edge of the house into the patio. It lighted the horrible figures and the dead face of the young Mexican. The gringo straightened the form, crossed the hands, and did all the loving little services his rough masculine mind could recall. It was the last he could do for the young friend with whom the exigencies of war had sealed a bond as close as Death

itself. No, there was one more thing he could do for Felipe: the little silver watch must be sent to the boy's mother on the morrow —if the federals——

Forrester's mind seemed a blank at this point. Felipe had said they would return tomorrow. Would they do so? He asked himself this question over and over again. He had felt a sense of security in these adobe walls as, from the little tower, he had watched the last of the federal soldiers trail over the distant plain and disappear after the day's fighting.

Fatigue, hunger, suspense; the frantic fighting for hours, barricaded in the patio of the old house, had begun to tell on the exhausted gringo. By sheer luck he had evaded the enemies' bullets while other men around him had fallen, one by one, during those terrible hours. It all seemed so far off now, and a strange peacefulness settled upon him. He sank down upon the stone floor of the corridor and leaned against an adobe pillar in an ecstasy of content.

The bright moonbeams played tricks of light. Shadows grew blacker and more appalling. The white adobe pillars shone ghastly in high relief. To Forrester's now feverish mind each object in the light was magnified to alarming proportions, each shadow was significant of dread. The freshening night breeze shook the dried gourd vines near him, and to his overwrought nerves this was a sudden rattle of musketry.

With a cry Forrester threw himself at the unseen enemy. The revolver in his belt was the only weapon he could command, but he grasped this and made ready to fire. Again the night wind mocked him. It sighed through the forlorn house and shook the empty casements. It sang in a voice weird and unearthly.

Forrester was thoroughly awake now and strode toward the lighted portion of the patio. Something hard and sharp struck against his thigh and he sprawled upon the object in his path. Instantly he recognized a machine gun which had been taken from the federals that day. Now he remembered vividly enough that it had nearly cost him his life, getting the gun into the patio with his comrade's assistance. But it was there, in the shadow, a fine, modern field-piece of steel, light of body, well oiled, flexible, a trusty servant, a responsive agent of destruction, a *friend!* He did not feel so much alone now.

He wheeled the gun into the moolight with little effort, and gazed at it with satisfaction. Its possession gave him the first thrill of

triumph he had felt since fate and a spirit of reckless love of fighting had cast his lot with the rebels of Mexico.

Then, as if the skies had suddenly fallen about him, he realized the truth,—there was no ammunition. The gun was empty! For a few delirous moments it had been his last hope, the open sesame between him and freedom, when the federals should return with the morning.

A resolve born of desperation came to the gringo as he stood, helpless, trapped, waiting for the dawn and—his doom. The engine of war that had destroyed life should itself be destroyed, and Forrester hesitated not a moment to carry out his purpose.

Understanding fully every part of the marvelously delicate mechanism, the lonely man worked at his task. Hour after hour passed and still he feverishly bent to the work of demolition. A shining heap of bolts and screws, of chilled steel and the countless etceteras that enter into the modern field piece, lay by his side.

At last it was finished, the task of destruction. There remained but the skeleton of what had been a masterpice. It was a havoc that would have dismayed a military officer.

A faint blush of pink in the eastern sky smote the man like a lash. The time had come for hasty action. Like a madman he tore at the flagging of the patio and loosened a stone. Beneath it he buried the smaller pieces of the machine. The wheels and frame work he carried to the little turret, hoping they might there be safe from discovery.

He had not long to wait. With the rising sun they came, the federals. A small squad had been sent to investigate the results of the previous day's fight, or to resume hostilities if there were any of the plucky rebels still alive. Everything was quiet, with the silence of death, when they entered the patio. They found the men where they had fallen. Then one of the officers discovered the loosened stone of the patio floor and hurriedly examined the earth beneath. His cry of amazement brought the others rushing to his side.

A shot rang out on the still morning air, and the officer, kneeling upon the patio floor, fell forward lifeless. The American, from his point of vantage in the little tower, had taken true aim; he had not hesitated. It took but a moment for the pack to find and overpower its prey, and roughly he was dragged down into the open patio.

The gringo stood, at last, before his judges. They questioned him as to the missing pieces of the precious gun; they found the

remnant in the tower. He alone remained alive of the handful of "obstinate" rebels. He had ruthlessly destroyed government property. He had killed one of their men. He was a rebel, he must die.

Such was the verdict of the impromptu court of justice there in the lonely adobe house, miles from other human habitation. Forrester expected no clemency. He felt he was entitled to but little; yet, at that moment, life and liberty seemed doubly sweet, and tragically remote.

A further council was held, in low tones, but the prisoner was not long kept in suspense. He was not to be shot immediately; he would be given a chance for his life under the "ley de fuga."

The American smiled cynically. It was the farcical "ley de fuga," the law of flight, infamous because an absolute misrepresentation of justice. It gives to the convicted one a "chance" for his life, but the "chance" is that of the released pigeon before the sportsman's rifle.

Usually the "ley de fuga" is enforced as soon as judgment has been pronounced. The first move of the doomed man is interpreted to mean "flight." And the military conscience is put at rest by the report of the officers: "Prisoner shot while in flight from justice."

The gringo listened to the pronunciamento. He knew what it meant and wondered how long he had to live. He was surprised when he was placed, shackled, upon one of the horses. A soldier walked by his side throughout the long ride to San Juan y Diego, the nearest town.

Solemnly he was "given his freedom" when the town limits were reached. The squad of soldiers saluted him gravely, politely, and went on their way. The streets were deserted, for it was yet early, and Forrester proceeded to the little hotel, where he broke his long fast. Even with death for a companion, the live young sturdy manhood within him claimed its portion of human rights, and food came first in the list of Nature's loud appeals.

Then Sleep the Restorer, claimed its own. The gringo, exhausted, unmindful of the grim Shade, slept long in his chair beneath the hospitable portales.

A gentle hand upon his shoulder awoke the man who was sleeping away his last hours on earth. Forrester started and peered anxiously into the kindly eyes above him.

"They're blue, thank God," he thought, "and that means they're American eyes, I hope."

A voice spoke in English; a hand sought his own in friendly grasp.

"I've just heard," the man was saying; then the voice quavered and ceased speaking.

Forrester was silent. He was still too dazed, too tired, to speak connectedly. Drowsily he motioned the stranger to a chair at a little table. He seated himself opposite and waited for the other to speak.

The newcomer proceeded timidly.

"You don't think they will do it, my friend, do you?"

"Kill me? Why of course they will, the devils!" A gleam of hatred shone in the gringo's eyes. "They are torturing me by degrees; at any moment, from a corner, from a window, from behind a pillar, I may be shot,—in the back,—remember, it will be in the back!"

The stranger glanced nervously about. It was apparent the doomed man's words had a disquieting effect upon him. They drank together, and both arose from the table.

"Is there anything I can do for you, my friend? You know, you and I are the only gringos here, and we must 'stand together.' I want to help you,—surely there is some last service I can render. Is there no one in the States to whom I can deliver a message, a keepsake? I would be only too glad to do this for you."

The stranger spoke with tenderness, with sincerity.

The words were intended to cheer the spirits of the man whom Death was stalking hourly. But there was tragedy in every word, as both men realized.

Forrester clasped the other man's hand in farewell. He hesitated, and a far-away look came into his eyes. In an instant it had vanished, and the grim, set face of the man foretold his words.

"No," he said firmly, "my people in the States do not know where I am. They will never know where or *how* I died!"

He turned away, then, suddenly, as though a thought, new and important, had come to his jaded mind, he wrote upon a card an address in Mexico City, and handed it with a little silver watch to the new-found friend.

"I had forgotten this," he said gently. "If you would do me a great favor, see that the mother receives this watch. Her son died in my arms last night,—a rebel like myself."

He stalked away, the gringo, whom the populace now looked upon askance from behind closed shutters and from around the street corners. Everyone had heard, everyone understood "el ley de fuga," and each wondered at the stay of execution.

The long, long day drew to a close, and still the gringo trudged on and ever on. Feverishly he drank at the cantinas, during the weary rounds, in order to numb his mind. He was not afraid. Instead, he prayed for the end. Why did they not shoot him? He paused by every closed window, at every corner, to afford a better opportunity for an unseen marksman. But no shot thrilled the expectant populace. The gringo lived on.

Then the welcome short twilight was heralded by the low sun dipping behind the distant, purpling hills. A brief space and the weary "fugitive" would cease the grind that had lasted from sun to sun.

For the hundredth time he had passed the little inn, "El Gran Hotel," the gaudy sign proclaimed, in the usual impudence of village hostelries in Mexico. Again the weary man paused. He turned, he knew not why, to the left and passed into a quiet street unpaced by him before. A group of tired burros pattered upon the cobbled pave, and the voices of the drivers blended in the confusion of sounds.

It came without warning, the ringing shot that ended all. The cowering populace within doors heard and understood, but it did not see the tragic end, as it would have liked. So little happened of importance in this quiet town, and—ah, well—he was only a gringo; he had been given a "chance" for his life in "el ley de fuga," and besides, what can one expect of a "rebel" and—*un Americano?*

In the Sea Called Red*

BY MICHAEL WHITE

SOMETIMES Kismet is kind. Now and then she not only gives a man a chance to redeem himself, but, bringing out some latent force of courage in him, does so in a setting of such circumstances that those who stand by take off their hats and remember his name at the top of their honor list. Take Preston for example.

As regards Preston no one in the second class of the *Ceylon,* outward bound via the Suez Canal for Eastern parts, knew anything about him. He kept entirely to himself, leaving to his fellow passengers whatever entertainment might be found in deciding upon his nationality, debating his profession, and arguing the subject of his presence on the ship. But in these days it is not easy for a man to conceal his identity, on the great highway around the world at any rate. Preston had been uncovered by a passenger in the first class, and though not witnessed by others the meeting had a touch of the dramatic. Preston climbed the ladder leading to the first class promenade deck to get a better view of some passing object, and—looked up into the face of a woman. Surprise and recognition were instantaneously mutual. She was still under thirty, well dressed, with character marked on handsome clear cut features, while he—into his face swept that shifting, haunting shadow of something done which on this earth is neither forgotten nor forgiven. So they chanced to come together at the gate which separates the first from the second class.

"My God!" he gasped. "I never expected to meet you here. I—you—you won't give me away, will you, Irene?"

He grasped the rail to steady himself from stumbling back down the ladder, looking up into her eyes with the pleading of a hunted animal. For a moment she regarded him unflinchingly, coldly unmoved, as one whose feelings had been grievously offended utterly past hope of reconciliation, as if the man who begged this of her

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might be likened to those who go hence to the potter's field of our memory, the dead upon whose tablets we write no *requiescat in pace*, no *resurgam*. But perhaps it was the outward and visible manner of the man reflecting his inward sense of degredation which touched in her a sense of pity—the last favor to be desired of a woman.

"Are you in want of money or anything?" she asked.

"No," he replied, asserting a display of firmness. "At least I never asked that of you. But —you won't give me away here, will you? I've got to find a place where I can start again without the handicap of that thing on me. Our country is too small. I always ran into someone who knew."

"You need have no fear of me," she turned away from him. "I—I had ceased to regard you even as among the living."

Preston went down to the second class feeling curiously grateful rather than any resentment at her attitude toward him. She had given him her word, and upon that he knew she would not disclose what she knew of him under another name. In the old days she had kept faith with him, and believed in his solemn oath when such had become otherwise a public jest. Even then—but what was now the use of vain regrets. He had been a fool, perhaps worse than a fool as people chose to regard his case. As a stone tossed over a cliff inevitably hits the rocks below, so he had flung away his best chance in life. Surely it was not for him to complain of feeling hurt by her manner. Hence he regarded himself in luck that it was she and not Bob, or Jack, or another who had discovered him on the Eastward bound ship. So he withdrew to his all-day occupation of reading books, not caring to mount that ladder to the first class deck again. It may be that a sense of the justice of his position caused him to avoid the possibility of another meeting, lest in her eyes it be taken for a renewal of his offense.

Meanwhile the *Ceylon* sped on her course, a little world of its own in which humanity at close quarters revealed itself without reserve on the whole gamut of character notes. But except for that one in the first class Preston remained practically unknown. In this way the *Ceylon* passed into the sun-blazed waters of the Red Sea and drew near to Aden.

Eight bells of the afternoon watch had struck. The few passengers on deck were stretched on long cane chairs under double awnings, gasping for breath in uneasy snatches of sleep. A following wind, swept from the furnace-like rocks of the Arabian coast, made the heat intolerable. Exertion of any kind was impossible. Save

for the pulsating rhythm of the engines driving the *Ceylon* at full speed through the smooth oily waters, there was no sound whatever. Suddenly this was sharply broken by one stroke of the engine room gong, the stand-by signal. Presently a quartermaster came down from the bridge, hurried along the deck, and tapped on the door of the captain's cabin. He spoke a few words and returned to his post. In a little while the captain came out of his cabin and went up on to the bridge.

Followed quickly two strokes of the engine room gong for half speed. From below the ship's doctor appeared. He joined the captain on the bridge. The gong signal to stop the engines produced activity among the watch on deck. It also wakened the dozing passengers under the double awnings. They sat up lazily, wanting to know why the ship had stopped. A passing officer informed them that they had sighted and were "speaking" to a "cholera" ship.

"A cholera ship!"

Those who knew the significance of it repeated the words with awe-inspired emphasis. These roused themselves, strode to the rail, lifted the side awnings, and blinked out across the dazzling waters. Half a mile to leeward lay the black squat hull of another steamer. From her flag pole her ensign hung at half mast and upside down. A string of flags from her main fluttered out a signal to the *Ceylon*. Through marine glasses her decks could be seen swarming with fanatical followers of the Mohammedan Prophet, and—and from a side port dark objects being dropped overboard. Shortly, along the leeward rail of the *Ceylon*, groups of passengers gathered, eager for further particulars. A little later, interpretation of the stranger's signal was passed from mouth to mouth.

"Steamer *Sumatra* from Bombay to Jiddah with pilgrims. Ship swept with cholera. Captain and doctor dead. Medical supplies and doctor urgently needed."

Presently a boat was seen putting off from the *Sumatra*. The captain and doctor of the *Ceylon* came down from the bridge and talked together on the upper deck above the side gangway below.

"That boat, sir," said the doctor, "must not be allowed to come alongside. We'd better not risk it."

"Well, what do you suggest?" questioned the captain. "We can't refuse them assistance."

"Load our dingy with whatever provisions and supplies they want. Then leave her for them to pick up."

"Very well," agreed the captain.

He gave an order to prepare the dingy, then turned again to the doctor.

"But they need someone, a physician, to take the situation in hand. That ship must be a perfect hell, ravaged by cholera."

"I don't quite see how I can go, sir," spoke the *Ceylon's* doctor. "I have one or two serious cases here to attend."

The Ceylon's doctor was a bit of a dandy in his white and brass button uniform. He was very capable in cases where young lady passengers were down with sea sickness, and greatly in demand at all kinds of social entertainment, but—but clearly not the man to tackle that cholera ship.

"No," the captain shook his head gravely. "No, we can't spare you, of course. But without the right kind of medical assistance I don't envy the first officer in charge of that ship."

As the boat from the *Sumatra* drew near she was hailed to stand off and wait to pick up the *Ceylon's* dingy. Meanwhile a dispute had been going on at the top step of the ladder leading from the second class to the upper deck. Preston had climbed that ladder for the second time, and was arguing with the quartermaster stationed there for permission to pass.

"I tell you," insisted Preston, "I want to speak with the captain on a matter of vital importance."

"Captain's now engaged," tersely replied the quartermaster. "You must wait until we move on again."

"I won't wait," retorted Preston hotly. "Stand back, if you don't want trouble."

He elbowed the quartermaster aside and strode along the upper deck to where the captain and the doctor were conversing.

"Captain Hardy," he began, "I am told medical assistance is badly needed on that cholera ship. Is that the case?"

The captain wheeled around to look Preston over, as if noticing him for the first time. In fact he did not recollect having seen him before.

"Yes," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I wish to volunteer. I guess I am still qualified to tackle that kind of job. I shall regard your permission as a favor."

"A favor!" repeated the captain, evidently thinking the request put in a strange form.

"Yes, in my case the greatest favor one man could bestow on another."

"Hardly see much of a favor in being allowed to ship over there," the captain jerked a hand toward the cholera stricken vessel. "Favor's all on the other side, I should say.

He turned a questioning glance upon the ship's doctor.

"But—but you are not down on the ship's list as a physician," protested he of the smart white uniform and brass buttons.

"No, but I can easily satisfy you that I am, or was, one. I presume there is not much time to spare for an examination, so a few questions should satisfy you of ability for work of this kind."

The captain nodded assent, and the ship's doctor drew Preston a few paces aside. It was not the occasion for a searching investigation into Preston's past or credentials. The signal for help was plainly desperate. Therefore the ship's doctor merely satisfied himself that the volunteer for the medical firing line was competent. This he reported to the captain.

"You, of course, fully realize what you are doing," the captain warned Preston. "That ship over there isn't any spick-and-span hospital ward. I should say your chance of walking ashore at Jiddah wouldn't be taken by any insurance company."

"I understand fully," replied Preston.

"Very well," agreed the captain. "You can tell my doctor what supplies you need. If you wish to forward any messages to relations or friends we'll transmit them free by wireless. That's about the least we can do for you."

"I—I have none to send," responded Preston.

Presently the news was spread about that a doctor in the second class, to whom few had even spoken, had volunteered to risk his life in a single-handed fight against the frightful odds of epidemic and fanaticism on that doomed, waiting ship. At once all interest was centered on him. Who was he? What was his name? Of a sudden he had become the man of the hour. Back and forth between the first and second class all that was known of him was asked and told. In the sum total it was little more than nothing. Up to that moment he was unknown among them, but beyond it his assumed name was likely to be remembered in letters of gold. Thus when Preston came on deck after making final plans with the ship's doctor and purser, he passed along aft to the dingy between two lines of keenly interested fellow travellers. His bearing had significantly changed, for he walked now with head erect, as one who was conscious of at least doing a manly thing, looking squarely in the face those who cast glances of admiration on him. By this

time seamen had loaded the boat with the supplies and were waiting for its single passenger. Preston climbed over the rail into the boat.

"When you touch water, unshackle the davit ropes and shove off," instructed the first officer.

"All right," replied Preston.

"Ready now?"

"Go right ahead."

The men at the davits slowly lowered the boat, while all along the ship's rail watching figures leaned over. When the boat settled on the water Preston obeyed the first officer's instructions. As she dropped away, clear of danger from the *Ceylon's* propellors, the engine room gong rang for slow speed ahead. It was then that the crowd on deck came to a full realization of what was happening. One of their number had elected to go to that sweltering tank of death at the desperate risk of his own life. Something—some expression of sympathetic feeling was surely due him.

"Good luck to you," a man shouted and waved his cap. "By God, you're built of the right kind of stuff. You can bet we won't forget you on this ship."

A cheer went up all along the rail, with a fluttering of women's handkerchiefs. Preston turned in the boat and waved his hand. A smile of triumph lighted up his whole face. Another cheer followed as the great ship glided past. From the bridge the captain gave the lone man in the boat a seaman's hearty farewell.

It was then a woman came on deck, roused from her afternoon rest by the general tumult. She joined a group at the rail, seeking information.

"Why," replied a military passenger, pointing to the boat now falling astern, "that fellow is really doing an awfully plucky thing. Going to try and stamp out a cholera outbreak on that pilgrim ship over there. Pretty risky considering she is full of a panic-stricken crowd of Mohammedans."

"Who—what is his name?" she asked quickly, shading her eyes as she directed her gaze on the boat.

"Preston, I believe. A doctor in the second class, but nothing else seems to be known about him."

She had turned very pale and did not hear the extended eulogy of her companion. In fact she left him abruptly, hastening aft to the stern of the ship. She stood there watching intently. Presently she saw Preston's boat taken in tow by the one from the *Sumatra* and pulled toward that ship. He turned around once. Apparently

he caught sight of her, for he stood up in the boat and lifted his sun helmet. The crowd on the *Ceylon* took it as a parting salute to them and gave him a rousing final cheer. Still she watched. She saw him reach the side of the cholera ship and climb on board. After him, the *Ceylon's* dingy was hauled up. Then the *Sumatra* raised her ensign to its proper place and broke the signal at her masthead:

"Thanks for assistance. Report our case at Aden."

The crowd on the *Ceylon's* deck broke up and went their several ways, those in the first class to dress for dinner. But the woman remained watching at the stern. Gradually the distance between the two vessels grew till at last the cholera ship was as a speck upon the horizon, a black dot against the flaming crimson of the sunset. Presently she bent her head slowly downward, dropped to her knees beside the rail, and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh why," she cried in heart rending sobs, "could he not have shown himself in his true light like this before. What—how could he have been so pitifully weak in smaller things and now so great at the final hour?"

A hand was laid on her shoulder. She started up to find her traveling companion standing beside her.

"I could not find you. I wondered where you had gone. Perhaps the heat today has been too trying."

"No," the woman replied, recovering self control with an effort. "No. You did not know. No one here knew, but that hero who went to the cholera ship was—was my husband."

The Adventures of a Night*

BY WILL S. GIDLEY

A NOTE, lying in full view upon the library table in his cosy bachelor apartment, was the first thing that caught the eye of Mr. Wayne Chisholm as he switched on the light upon returning late one evening from his club. The note was written in pencil and evidently had been left by some caller, though how any stranger could have visited the library in his absence was a mystery, as no one to his knowledge possessed a key to the apartment except himself and the caretaker.

Chisholm read the note with wrinkled brow:

"Sir:

If you are the man we think you are, we will make it worth your while to join us in a midnight adventure. If you decide to do so, be at the corner of Jackson Boulevard and Harrison Street, Farragut Square, tonight at twelve sharp. Will be on the lookout for you.

Hastily yours,
ADVENTURE CLUB"

Despite the mysterious manner in which it had come into his possession he was half inclined to regard it as the work of some practical joker. Still, he reflected, there might possibly be something in it, something worth looking into. And even if it ended in nothing he would at least have the thrill of adventure while it lasted. It would take him out of the usual rut for the moment, and—

He paused and shot a hasty glance at the small, silver-mounted clock that ticked upon the mantel. The hands pointed to 11.40.

"Let me see," he mused, "Farragut Square, corner Jackson Boulevard and Harrison Street. It will be a close shave, but I think I can make it yet!"

Stepping into the hallway, he carefully closed and locked the door of his apartment behind him and hurried from the building into the street.

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Several doors distant a taxi, having deposited its passengers upon the sidewalk, was moving slowly away from the curb. Chisholm hailed it and breathlessly entered.

As the cab once more got under way, he sank back against the leather cushions with a sigh of relief. Taxicabs were scarce in the residential district at that hour of the night, and he considered himself very fortunate to have secured one thus easily.

Meanwhile the driver, spurred on by the promise of a liberal reward should he reach his destination before midnight, was forcing his cab to its topmost speed, bumping roughly over trolley tracks and whirling swiftly around corners in a manner that momentarily threatened destruction to both himself and the machine.

Ten minutes of this breakneck speed brought the cab to the upper end of Farragut Square, where it came to a sudden halt.

"Here you are, sir, right on time!" announced the cabby.

Springing out, Chisholm handed him the promised bill and walked hurriedly towards the spot designated in the note—the intersection of Jackson Boulevard and Harrison Street.

As he strode along he kept his right hand in the pocket of his light topcoat, where an automatic revolver was reposing. Whatever the game might be, he had no intention of being caught unprepared.

Arriving at the corner, he found it deserted. The illuminated clock on the tower of a nearby skyscraper told him that it still lacked one minute of the hour. Lighting a cigar, he stepped into the shelter of a doorway and awaited developments.

It was a clear November night. The ground was as yet free from snow, but the air was damp and chilly. Walking, Chisholm would not have minded it. But standing still, the cold soon worked its way through his thin evening garments and made him extremely uncomfortable.

As the minutes dragged slowly by and the street remained as silent and deserted as ever, Chisholm grew impatient. What a fool he had been to take any stock in a note which had evidently been written by some humorous-minded acquaintance for the sole purpose of testing whether he, Chisholm, would be chump enough to bite. And the most humiliating part of it all was that he had taken the bait, swallowed it hook and all, as it were, and risked breaking his neck in a wild-goose chase across the city in a cab at midnight, while no doubt the originator of the joke was chuckling to himself at the success of his scheme.

A wave of anger swept over him as he thought of it, and tossing

his half-smoked cigar into the street he stepped from the shelter of the doorway and was about to make off in disgust when the sound of approaching footsteps attracted his attention and brought him to a halt once more.

Chisholm's first thought was that it was the writer of the note he had received, coming to keep his appointment. "Better late than never!" he growled. But the next moment, instead of the adventurer he had expected, a blue-coated patrolman came slowly around the corner into the square.

Noticing Chisholm, he stopped, surveyed him suspiciously for a moment, then apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, passed on. Chisholm glared wrathfully after the retreating figure until it was out of sight, just as if the patrolman were somehow to blame for his disappointment. Then he shot a final glance at the illuminated dial, which now registered twenty minutes after midnight, and with an exclamation of disgust turned on his heel and strode off into the darkness. Practical jokes of the particular brand that had been perpetrated upon him that evening did not appeal to his sense of humor in the slightest.

But Chisholm, though thoroughly disgusted and disappointed, did not at once turn his steps toward his apartment. Instead, he struck out aimlessly, walking wherever his fancy led him, now turning to the right and now to the left, but always working towards the lower section of the city.

He had wasted enough time on fake adventures. Perhaps he could scare up a real one if he tried hard enough. At any rate there was no use of returning to his apartment yet. If Lyndon, who had rooms across the hall, was the originator of that brilliant note scheme, he would doubtless be watching for his return, ready to jolly him in that dry, sarcastic manner which he used upon such occasions. At least he would deny him that satisfaction.

He walked briskly, his powerful shoulders thrown back, his eyes alert, breathing deeply of the bracing night air until the chilly sensation which had stolen over him was replaced by a feeling of warmth that made the topcoat seem an unnecessary protection.

Soon the streets began to grow narrower, the arc lights became less frequent, and the prosperous-looking dwellings of the upper section of the city gave way to tall, dingy tenements, cheap stores, dark and deserted, and grim, ugly warehouses.

To all these Chisholm gave little heed. He felt amply able to take care of himself and he rather enjoyed the novelty of the situation.

As he turned into a street, darker, more gloomy and forbidding than any he had yet traversed, his foot struck against something that was lying upon the sidewalk and sent it sliding along the pavement ahead of him. Overtaking it, he was on the point of shoving it aside into the gutter when suddenly he stopped and from idle curiosity stooped and picked it up.

His find proved to be a lady's sidecomb. There was nothing remarkable about that, but jammed tightly between the teeth of the comb was a folded paper. That certainly *was* odd.

His interest thoroughly aroused, Chisholm carefully removed the folded slip of paper from the comb, and taking a small electric flashlight from his pocket he trained it upon his find.

It proved to be a scrap of wall paper, of cheap pattern and very much faded. He opened it and turned it over. Upon the reverse side, penciled in an obviously feminine hand, was this appeal:

" TO THE PERSON FINDING THIS PAPER:

I am imprisoned upon the second floor of this tenement, rear room on side towards alley. Please help. Say 'Riverside' and I will know you are a friend.

HILDA NORWOOD"

"Hilda Norwood," repeated Chisholm to himself. Where had he seen or heard that name before? Then like a flash it came to him. She was the daughter of Randolph Norwood, the copper magnate; the girl who had been recently kidnapped and was being held for $25,000 ransom. The papers had been full of it, and clue after clue had been followed up by the police without result.

Norwood from the first had resolutely declined to deal with the kidnappers. "Millions, if necessary, for the defense of my home, and to place the kidnappers behind the bars, but not one cent for tribute!" had been his motto, and he had led the search for the missing girl tirelessly and vigilantly both day and night, but her captors had hidden their tracks so well that not the slightest trace of her whereabouts had yet been discovered.

By the merest chance Chisholm had stumbled upon a clue which many an aspiring patrolman or detective of the local police force would have given a year's salary to possess. For there was not the slightest reason to doubt the genuineness of the note, and that in one of the upper rooms of the ramshackle and apparently empty tenement before which he was standing, was confined the victim of one of the most daring and sensational kidnapping crimes the city had ever known.

For a moment Chisholm hesitated. No doubt the proper thing to do under the circumstances would be to notify the police. But the lust of adventure was in his blood, he had already been cheated out of one adventure that night, and now with the prospects of another before him he, with the venturesome over-confidence of youth, decided to attempt the rescue alone.

The message on the scrap of wall paper had stated that Miss Norwood was confined in the rear room on the second floor, next to the alley. The next question was how to reach her. If there had been a fire escape on the rear of the building it would have been an easy matter to gain access to the second story, but a brief investigation told Chisholm there was none.

He next tried the front door of the building, but found it securely locked.

Returning to the alley, he hastily transferred his automatic revolver to his hip pocket and divested himself of his topcoat. Then kneeling down upon the ground he pressed gently but firmly upon one of the narrow cellar windows. It gave way, swinging in on its rusty hinges, and tossing his overcoat in ahead of him, he wormed his way through and dropped lightly upon the cellar floor.

With the aid of an occasional flash of light from his searchlight he cautiously made his way to the stairway leading to the first floor. He started to ascend, pausing now and then to listen, but no sound came from the rooms above him. All was as quiet as a tomb.

So far so good. But the hardest task was to come. He had yet to find and gain admission to the chamber in which Miss Norwood was held a captive by the kidnappers.

Grasping his revolver in readiness for instant use, he made his way upward as quietly as possible, soon arriving at the second floor. Here he paused for a moment to get his bearings. All about him was silence and impenetrable darkness. Not daring to use his flashlight further for fear of attracting attention, he felt his way along the narrow hallway until he reached the door which, as nearly as he could judge, opened into the room in which the girl was imprisoned. He found it securely fastened. Bending down he placed his mouth close to the keyhole and called softly:

"Riverside!"

There was a slight stir from within and he repeated the call, this time somewhat louder.

As he did so, an arm shot out from the darkness behind him and wound itself around his neck, an iron grip closed about his right

wrist, and he felt himself being borne steadily backwards to the floor. He struggled desperately, but fruitlessly. The arm about his neck tightened mercilessly, shutting off his breath; his revolver was suddenly wrenched from his hand; something struck him a crashing blow on the head; then came oblivion.

When he recovered consciousness, he found himself lying at full length upon the floor, his limbs tightly bound and throbbing with pain, while a rudely constructed gag shut off his speech and caused the muscles of his jaw to ache most unpleasantly.

His first thoughts were of the girl. How foolhardy he had been to undertake to effect her release single handed. Now, having discovered that her hiding place was known, her captors would doubtless remove her to some other portion of the city, and he, also, would be confined until the ransom was forthcoming, or perhaps be put out of the way altogether. For criminals as desperate as they had shown themselves to be, would stop at nothing to effectually conceal their identity and shield themselves from molestation of the law.

Yes, he had bungled things very neatly, indeed. But it would not do to give up without a fight for life and liberty. And as he lay there in the darkness, despite the pain which his movements caused, he struggled silently and determinedly to free himself. At length, after what seemed hours of tugging and straining, he managed to draw first one hand and then the other free from its bonds.

He now raised himself to a sitting position and set about ridding himself of the ropes that tightly encircled his ankles. Having the use of his hands, this was a comparatively simple task.

Barely had he completed untying the knot that held the ropes, when the sound of heavy footsteps warned him that someone was approaching. With a quick movement he rolled over on his back, hiding the unraveled knots from view. He congratulated himself that he had not, as yet, removed the gag.

A key rattled noisily in the lock, there was the creaking of a door being opened, a light flashed into the room, and the footsteps came nearer. Closing his eyes, Chisholm held himself tense and rigid for the examination which he felt sure was to follow.

But the man who had entered the room did not seem at all disposed to make a very careful inspection of his prisoner. Advancing unsteadily, he gave the prostrate figure a vicious shove with his foot. Chisholm lay as though unconscious for what seemed the longest minute he had ever known. Then, muttering something

about being sent on a fool's errand, the man vented his wrath in another spiteful kick and turned to leave.

Now was Chisholm's chance. Springing swiftly to his feet, he leaped upon the back of the intruder. There was a short struggle, and the man lay limp upon the floor.

Chisholm's first move was to bind and gag him securely, using for that purpose the ropes that had recently held him a prisoner. This task accomplished, he hastily ransacked his victim's pocket, bringing to light his own automatic revolver and flashlight, and a small bunch of keys.

This last find was a most valuable one. For to forcibly effect an entrance into the room in which Miss Norwood was confined would result only in arousing the other members of the gang and bringing them down upon him. And that was the last thing Chisholm wished to do.

Stepping into the hallway he allowed the rays of his flashlight to play for an instant about him, and discovered to his intense satisfaction that he was directly in front of the room for which he was in search. Evidently at the time of capture he had been dragged across the hall and dumped upon the floor of the room opposite.

Placing his lips close to the door he called in low tones:

"Miss Norwood?"

"Yes," came the reply. "Who are you?"

"Riverside," called back Chisholm, and dropping his revolver in his pocket he began trying the keys. It was but a few seconds' work to find the correct one and open the door.

Stepping into the room Chisholm pressed the button of his flashlight, enveloping the imprisoned girl in a flood of yellow radiance. Only for an instant did he allow its rays to play upon her. But that instant was sufficient to show him that she was a decidedly attractive young woman. Despite the anxious, tired look in her eyes, caused by her long vigil, she was still beautiful. The papers had told of her great beauty, but at the first sight of her Chisholm realized that the truth had not half been told. Mere words were powerless to describe her charms of face and form.

She was seated upon a small, dilapidated cot, but as the light flashed over her she rose quickly and advanced toward Chisholm.

"Oh, I'm so glad you have come to my assistance! It is so good of you to answer my appeal," she began impulsively. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Don't try," said Chisholm quietly. "I'm only too glad to be of

service to you. But let's get out of here first, and talk afterwards. I've got one of the brutes trussed up in the room across the hall, but the others are probably around somewhere. Just take hold of my arm and come along. I think we can get by them all right, at any rate we'll take the chances."

Keeping close together they felt their way along the hall and commenced the perilous descent to the first floor. When half way down, there was the sound of a door opening below, and a rough voice called out:

"What's the matter with you, Saunders? Goin' to spend all night up there? How is the young cub, anyhow? Come to yet?"

Chisholm and the girl stopped in their descent and crouched closer against the wall.

"I say what the bloomin' blazes is wrong up there?" repeated the voice angrily. "That young dude ain't got loose, has he?"

"Naw," Chisholm responded harshly, suddenly realizing that unless an answer was forthcoming the man below would grow suspicious and begin an investigation, "he's roped up all right yet."

"Well," responded the voice gruffly, "then why in thunder don't you hustle down? We've got business to talk over yet tonight."

The voice ceased speaking and the door shut with a slam.

"Come on," whispered Chisholm to the girl, and hurriedly they descended the remaining steps to the lower hallway.

As Chisholm fumbled with the fastenings of the front door, footsteps sounded at the farther end of the hall and the same voice that had called out before rasped:

"So that's your little game, is it,—sneaking out all by your lonesome, eh? Goin' to sell out to the p'lice? You're a cute duck, Saunders, but the trick won't work!"

With a final wrench, Chisholm flung open the door and quickly thrust the girl outside.

"Stand right there," he commanded sharply, "and yell 'police' the best you know how,—and wait for me. I'll be with you soon as I have settled this chap."

The girl signified that she understood, and as Chisholm shut the door behind her and faced about, he found himself standing in the full glare of an electric flashlight, which the man who had mistaken him for Saunders had turned upon him.

"Oh, ho! So it's you, is it?" growled the bearer of the light. "Got loose and tryin' to sneak off with the gal, eh? Well, how far d'ye think you're goin' to get. I'll fix you both now!"

The speaker, having mistaken Chisholm for Saunders, had not taken the precaution to arm himself as usual before stepping into the hallway, but there was no time now to go back for his revolver. Snarling with rage, he dropped the searchlight with a crash to the floor and made a rush in the darkness for Chisholm.

Chisholm sprang lightly aside and tripped his assailant as he passed him. He went down but was instantly on his feet again, and grappled with Chisholm. Back and forth they battled in the darkness until at last, with a savage uppercut, Chisholm caught his burly opponent on the point of the jaw—a little trick he had learned in his college days—and dropped him like a log.

Flinging open the door, Chisholm rejoined the girl, who was still shouting for the police.

"That fellow won't bother us right away," he said quietly as he took her arm and started down the steps. "You can take a breathing spell now if you wish, Miss Norwood."

They paused at the foot of the steps, and the girl turned and faced Chisholm. As she did so she gave a start. "Why, your face is all bruised and bloody!" she cried.

"Never mind; I got it in a good cause," replied Chisholm. "Hello, —here come the police. I thought your cries would rout them out."

"What's going on here? Somebody getting killed?" excitedly questioned a policeman who came running up at that moment.

"Yes; what's all this yelling for the police about?" demanded a second officer, who reached the spot three seconds later.

"Oh, nothing much," responded Chisholm with quiet sarcasm. "Only I thought perhaps you might be interested to know that Miss Norwood has been found, and the men who kidnapped her are inside the building in front of which we are standing, in case you want them. You will find one of them upstairs, bound and gagged. There is another of the gang on the floor in the lower hallway. I gave him a settler on the point of the jaw just now. He's a game fighter. Better go ahead and nab him before he comes to."

"But how about Miss Norwood? One of us ought to accompany her home for protection," suggested one of the officers.

"Not at all necessary," spoke up the young lady. "My rescuer will attend to that. But one of you may telephone my father at 195 Washington Boulevard that we are on the way there, if you will be so kind. Shall we start now, Mr. —?"

"Chisholm—Wayne Chisholm is my name," supplied that gentleman, offering her his arm. which she smilingly accepted.

Sadly, almost tearfully, the two coppers gazed at each other as the young couple marched away. Gloomily they shook their heads. Thoughts almost too bitter for utterance surged within their bosoms. But finally they found their voices.

Said No. 1: "Did you ever see such infernal luck?"

Said No. 2: "Infernal doesn't begin to express it! A fortune slipping right through our fingers—not to mention the glory! Come on. I suppose we've got to lug those kidnappers in, even if another fellow does get the credit for the capture."

"Yes, I s'pose so," was the gruff response.

And with a simultaneous grunt of disgust the two officers drew their weapons and marched into the building.

The hands of the clock on the mantel pointed to 4:40 when Chisholm unlocked the door of his apartment and, stepping inside, switched on the lights. He was walking on air, with his head in the clouds, but he was soon brought down to earth by the sight of a folded sheet of note paper lying upon the library table in precisely the same spot where he had discovered the previous note some five hours before—which document, by the way, was now reposing in an inside pocket of his topcoat upon the cellar floor of the tenement in which he had encountered the kidnappers and met for the first time a certain blue-eyed maiden.

Chisholm frowned impatiently.

"If this is some more of Lyndon's work he's carrying his joke altogether too far," he snapped, striding over and picking the note up. But he saw it was not from Lyndon, as he read:

"KIND FRIEND:

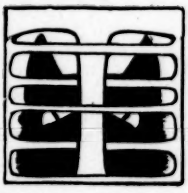
Much obliged for clearing out as you did and giving me a chance to work without interruption. I was just getting ready to start in when I heard a taxi outside. I had a hunch it might be you and I had to think quick, but I did it. The result was the note, which I hastily scrawled off and then concealed myself to await developments. Many thanks for swallowing the bait. Hope you do not begrudge me the few valuables I have taken.

Ever your grateful debtor,
A HUMBLE HOUSEBREAKER"

"Begrudge him a few valuables?" laughed Chisholm light-heartedly. "Not I! Why, bless him, if I had his address I'd send him a letter of thanks. If it hadn't been for him and his note I would have missed the most glorious adventure of my life!"

The Storm Coward*

BY WILLIAM EDGAR MEDCALF



HE Foster house, squatting low between two ragged elms, on a fashionable suburban drive, looked like a wart on the hand of a princess.

Its mortar-stained bricks, grinning at the gray stones of the Valkert mansion over the way, had been an eyesore to the latter's master till the day he died. Five generations of Fosters had stubbornly refused either to sell or to improve the ancient house, and Major Valkert lived to see it pass into the hands of the last living heir who, thank Heaven! was a bachelor, far from handsome.

Dr. Wilber Foster, tall, dark-faced, and wiry as an Arab, had come from the western frontier, schooled in the simple life of ranch and mine, strong, fearless, honest; and had posted his surgeon's shingle over the low, scarred door.

He bought a motor car; announced that he would serve both rich and poor; converted three of his sixteen rooms into an office and bed room; installed a telephone, electric lights, modern plumbing, and last of all, a moving-van load of small, iron beds and bedding.

"A sanitarium, of course," concluded his neighbors, but they were soon undeceived. What they did really discover, enraged most of the smart set.

The brown automobile soon became known as "Foster's urchin car." Ragged boys ranging in age from six to sixteen years found their way to the warm rooms and generous table of the Foster house. They learned the use of the bathtub, kitchen range, mops and brooms. Their quarrels were settled at "Dock's" court, and from it there was no appeal.

As a matter of fact, Dr. Foster pressed but few silver door bells, yet it became known that he possessed great skill as a surgeon and the distinction of "slum doctor" seemed to please rather than irritate him. So many people of the underworld found their way to his office to pay bit by bit, their easy accounts, that the coming of the storm coward attracted no attention.

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It was Sunday. A March flurry of sleet dashed against the narrow panes of the office window. The boys were romping in the coach-house to settle their pork and beans. The doctor lounged on his leather couch, where he could look across at the Valkert mansion, sparkling under its tinsel of sleet. A thin man, clad in a baggy coat and ragged trousers, loitered along the boulevard, stopping every few feet to gaze at the granite pile, just as many a hungry, cold fellow had done. But why he appeared to see only the roof and lofty tower rather than the doors and windows, the doctor could not understand. Now he was shading his eyes with a rusty glove and peering high up at the brazen tip of a lightning rod. Slowly his gaze shifted, and he surveyed the Foster house. The doctor showed himself at the window and smiled, and the man approached the door.

A gust of warm air swept into the bearded face as the medical man opened to ask him in.

"Thanks, sir. You're Dr. Foster?"

"Yes. Sit down. Pretty cold for you easterners," observed the physician.

"Pretty crimpy, you bet. All night in a cattle car, wasn't so stuffy neither. These here fools who want to sleep on screened porches ought to try stock cars, then, maybe, skip a meal or two so the fresh air'd soak in good."

"You've been traveling with Brindle then?" smiled the host.

"Brindle's right. I unloaded at the stockyard about five A.M. and took breakfast at a pump."

Dr. Foster's keen gray eyes, scrutinizing the stranger's hairy face, discovered that a wild beard ill became a man of thirty years; that his guest was nervous, wrinkled-browed, and pale.

"You are hungry?" he ventured.

"Well, yes, sir, I could relish a snack," admitted the man.

The doctor opened a rear door and shouted, "Sandy," and a redhead bobbed out of the coach house.

"Heat the coffee, Sandy," he ordered, "and set out a lunch for a hungry chap."

The lad bounded into the kitchen with the air of a skilled chef and fell to work. Dr. Foster returned to the office and found his man perusing the new almanac with eager interest.

"Storms, plenty of them, for March and April," blurted the fellow.

"We usually get some good ones about the 21st," returned the doctor.

"The old major shuffled off, aye?" was the other's random observation as he leaned toward the window.

"He died late in the autumn, I believe. Did you know him?"

"Yes, I knew the old scoundrel, better than he knew me. The girl is *it* now, I presume."

"I'm not in touch with the Valkerts," laughed the doctor, "but they tell me that Miss Athens is very rich and very beautiful."

"She's both good and strong," assured the visitor. "I have the major to thank for these rags and my empty stomach," he added bitterly.

Later, his hunger appeased and his thin blood warm, Paul Milroy talked more freely, and Dr. Foster listened attentively to his story.

"Dad and I were plumbers," he began, "not union workmen, but as good as the best of them. Valkert wanted a new system and set about, as he always did, to get it installed as cheap as possible. We tried for it. Six weeks we dickered with the major. The union fellows fought us strong, but Valkert hated organized labor, so after drawing up a dozen different agreements, we finally landed the job. Well, Dad was pretty old and it was a big deal for him. Fact is, I had to do most of the work. We were nearly half done, when the major began the trouble. He found flaws, or pretended to; brought in a strange chap who claimed to be an expert; tangled Dad and me up on one item after another; called the union men in; in short, wove the web that ruined my old man and hastened his death. Our work was all right, Dock, but the major set out to hornswoggle us, and he did. I saw it coming and told Dad we might as well throw up the sponge. We sued him, but lost out. I hung around there and tried to excite the major's sympathy, but he had none. It wound us up, and the union fellows finished the job. That was last fall, and as soon as I buried Dad, I hiked it for the Southwest. Hard luck stuck to me, and not long ago I picked up an old paper and read that the major had passed out.

"Well," he resumed after a pause, "the girl seemed pretty square, so I have hoboed it back, to see if I can get a concession from her. If I don't,—well, things sometimes square folks up, anyhow."

"I think that she is in Europe now," said Dr. Foster.

"Maybe she is. It'll just be my luck."

Dr. Foster's smooth brow suddenly furrowed. His swarthy cheeks blazed and the nervous Milroy shrank slightly.

"Do you mean," demanded the surgeon, "that you are going to make a pitiful appeal to Miss Valkert for a reimbursement of this loss her father's act entailed? Is that it?"

"I—well, I thought she might, being a woman," faltered the other.

"She might, yes," Dr. Foster pronounced, "but such favors from

women draw eternal interest at a high rate. Your predicament humbles you too much. Go to the bath room, sir. Shave that unsightly beard, get into the gray suit that hangs in the closet, shake your shattered pride together, and come downstairs. That's the medicine I give my boys, and enlarged doses help men."

Milroy obeyed with the promptness of a small boy, and the doctor settled himself at the window, just in time to see the chauffeur drive the Valkert car from the garage and whirl toward the city.

With an awakened interest, he surveyed the imposing edifice from the carved blocks of its foundation to the airy cornices. The sinking sun burned a notch in the clouds and for a moment decked the mansion in icy gems. It was a fair picture, as though departing winter would leave a compensation for the suffering he always caused. So in a sort of severe ecstacy, Paul Milroy found his benefactor.

"That's more like it!" declared Dr. Foster, as the tidy, clean-faced man entered. A grizzly tramp was transformed into a pale, almost boyish young man. His nervousness was still more evident, now that his twitching lips and restless eyes were conspicuous. Before the doctor framed his silent comment into words, there was a low mutter of thunder, which brought Milroy from his chair with an audible gasp.

"Why man! you are a hypochondriac, I fear," exclaimed Dr. Foster gravely.

"I can't help it, Dock, indeed I can't. I'll take a turn in the air till I calm down. I've been exposed to a heap of late, and bothered in my mind."

The doctor waved him back to the chair and then wrote a prescription.

"Go to the Adams Drug Store, sir," he commanded, "and get this tonic. They will charge it. Come back and remain here over night."

The man took the slip, murmured "thanks," slily borrowed the almanac while the host's back was turned, and hastened out into the road.

He proceeded half sidewise, while he stared at the Valkert house. Foster watched him from the window, noting that he eyed the clouds, or craned his neck to see the very top of that granite tower. He saw him cross the first street, then break into a giddy trot.

"The fellow is a bit unbalanced, I fear," mused the physician, returning to the fire. His noisy herd of waifs chattered into the house, and began to prepare the evening meal. Their boisterous tongues and tramping heels appeared not to disconcert the doctor.

He only smiled when a chair tumbled over, or a youngster squealed in the back hall. All that juvenile din did not sound so harsh and wild as the long, sharp ring of the telephone which broke in upon his thoughts with a sort of ominous suggestion.

"Some Dago with a knife in him, I suppose," he muttered, grasping the receiver.

"Dr. Foster?" The voice so soft and tremulous sounded close to his ear.

"Yes, madam."

"Please come over to Valkert's at once. My car has struck a poor man. Hurry, will you, Doctor?"

His promise was cut short by the switch, and in less than a minute Dr. Foster was climbing the hill toward the mansion.

The handsome car stood at the side entrance, and the muffled chauffeur ran down the walk to meet the surgeon.

"You were so close," he cried, "she thought of you instantly."

"You hit some one?" was the doctor's calm question.

"Hit him an awful side swipe, Doctor. The fellow seemed bewildered and ducked into the street almost in front of me. He was looking at the clouds or something high up, and probably didn't see the car or hear my shout. What we hate most is that Miss Athens knows the guy. He worked for the major."

Dr. Foster grasped the truth, long before he climbed the velvet stairs to an upper apartment, where Milroy lay unconscious upon a handsome, brass bed. Standing over him, seemingly unmindful of the blood that soiled the bedding, was Miss Valkert, still clad in furs and wearing her hat. Her dark eyes met the physician's serene countenance, as he bent over the other side of the bed.

"Why didn't you send him to the hospital, Miss Valkert?" he asked.

"Why, Doctor," she returned gravely, "it happened almost in my dooryard, besides, he used to work here. He is a plumber. I shall certainly see that he has every attention."

While Dr. Foster worked with the patient, he gave a disconnected account of Milroy's visit, omitting, of course, that which pertained to the Valkerts. At last he said, "You are likely to have him here some time. I should advise that he be sent to the hospital."

"No," she opposed a little sharply. "Can't you treat him here? I'll employ any nurse you recommend."

"Certainly. I will send Miss Hatcher, my nurse."

For nearly a week, Dr. Foster contended with broken ribs and fractured skull, while his patient lay wholly oblivious to the events

transpiring in that elegant chamber. He must have seen in his delirium the beautiful, young face which frequently bent close to his burning head, and felt the touch of that jeweled hand as it smoothed his pillow. Perhaps he saw in the misty distance a tall, sober man coming near at times, to handle him gently. Whatever he may have dreamed during those jumbled hours, the return of consciousness was a fearful shock to him.

It came on a bright, warm morning, when the sunshine pouring through an open window would have brought joy to the average sufferer. Instead, Milroy tried desperately to quit his bed. The strong hands of a nurse detained him. Her assurance that he was safe and comfortable in the Valkert mansion, had the effect of throwing him into a wild frenzy. He begged, swore, threatened, in his demand to be sent to the hospital, the jail, any place. Dr. Foster was called in haste, and met at the door by Miss Valkert herself.

"Why, Doctor!" she cried, "that man must be a maniac. The very sunshine frightens him to distraction. He asked the day of the month, and when we told him that it was the twenty-second, he became perfectly frantic."

"The man seems to be a storm coward, Miss Valkert," explained Dr. Foster, with a grim smile. "He may have at some time in his life been severely shocked by lightning. Such experiences do not affect men and dogs differently. Besides," he added, "Milroy is a nervous wreck due, no doubt, to hard luck and exposure."

"Dock, Dock!" cried the patient, the instant he saw the physician, "take me to the hospital. I beg you to do it."

"Oh, be calm, Milroy. You behave like a hysterical woman. You have been in the West. Where is your nerve? We can't move you, without great danger to your life. I'd like to be sick here myself."

The man shivered, then groaned.

"Are we neglecting you in any way?" asked Miss Valkert sweetly.

"No, no; you are kind as a sister, but I can't live here."

Dr. Foster glanced from the window. His countenance grew still more serious, and the beautiful face opposite borrowed part of the anxious expression.

"Milroy," began the doctor, presently, "were you ever shocked by lightning, or what makes you afraid of storms?"

"I'm not afraid of them," he whined. "They tear me all to pieces, and I can't help it."

"Well, there's going to be one, before many hours," comforted Dr. Foster, "and it will probably be no worse here than at the hospital. Now you must lie still and stop this foolishness."

"Don't scold, Doctor," Miss Valkert formed with her lips, without audible words. Then she leaned over Milroy to add, "storms don't hurt this house. It is well built, and has plenty of lightning rods."

With her last utterance, the hot face grew ashen and a cold perspiration burst through the pores. Dr. Foster shook his head, and his hand went forward to force Milroy back upon his pillow. A shadow crept across the window, and the nurse closed the sash and drew the shade.

There followed a period of absolute silence, during which the three watchers seemed to be thinking. Milroy closed his eyes, and the twitching lips appeared to be forming words. Either a doze of exhaustion or a brief moment of unconsciousness fell upon him, and the doctor seized the opportunity to hold a consultation with Miss Valkert and the nurse. Peeping back to see that his patient remained in the stupor, Dr. Foster led the way down to the library at the foot of the stairs, and there faced Miss Valkert with a puzzled look.

"This man," he opened slowly, "is either demented, or marked in some extraordinary manner. I believe," he proceeded delicately, "that he had some trouble with the major, did he not?"

"That is quite true, Doctor," she asserted, "and for that reason I am all the more anxious that he recover. It was not a fair deal," she went on, in her earnestly frank way, "and I mean to adjust it when he gets well. Not only that, I shall pay him for the damage he has suffered in this unfortunate accident."

Dr. Foster smiled approvingly, and proffered his hand.

"This is very noble of you, Miss Valkert. Now it may be well for us to humor his whims while he is so weak. If your chauffeur will convert the car into an ambulance,I will take him over to my house."

"In that landslide of street arabs?" exclaimed Miss Valkert. "Why, Doctor, a thunder storm is a lullaby compared with that."

"I can quiet my boys," asserted Dr. Foster, "but I can't stop the elements."

"Certainly, the machine is at your disposal," she assured him, and reached for the bell button. The chauffeur appeared and, after receiving instructions from the doctor, hastened to make the car comfortable.

Dr. Foster, Miss Valkert, and the nurse lingered in the library, till the machine was ready, and then started toward the sick room. They had hardly reached the upper corridor, when the doctor uttered a little gasp, pushed by the nurse, and bounded toward the open door

of the patient's room. Words more befitting a ranch or a mining camp, than the Valkert home, burst from his lips when he saw the empty bed and other signs of hasty departure. Instantly there was a cry of alarm, and the servants gathered in the hall.

A wild search began. Chauffeur, janitor, cook, housekeeper and, in short, everybody joined in the hunt. Cellar, attic, and private apartments were entered. Then the doctor and Miss Valkert ran down the front steps just in time to see Sandy come bounding over the stone wall toward them.

"Dock," he shouted breathlessly, "come over home quick. That guy what Miss Valkert jimmied up, is over in the coach house, most ready to croak."

Dr. Foster and his companion had not stopped running, but followed close upon Sandy's flying heels. On the floor of the coach house, they found Milroy's prostrate form. Four of the urchins were poking cushions under his head and body, and doing what they could to help him.

"This will probably wind him up," said the doctor as he and three boys carried the limp form to the office. Miss Valkert followed them, and a moment later the nurse entered.

It was far into the night, ere the constant efforts of nurse and physician brought the patient out of his almost lifeless stupor. His eyes swept the apartment, and a contented smile crept over the bloodless face. It quickly vanished, however, for there suddenly rumbled a distant roll of thunder, and a pale flash lit up the window. Before Dr. Foster could reach the cot, Milroy was sitting on its edge staring like a mad man.

"Where's she?" he suddenly gasped in a hoarse whisper."

"The nurse? She's right here," replied the doctor.

"Not her, no. Miss Valkert," he forced out.

"Over home. It is after midnight," he was informed gently.

Another flash of lightning and a rumble of thunder. This time it required both the doctor and the nurse to get Milroy back to bed.

For a time the man lay motionless, with his hands clasped over his breast, while his countenance underwent several changes of expression; resignation, fear, rage, and blankness. Miss Hatcher covered every crack through which the lightning might flash its disturbing signals.

"Dock," called the feeble voice.

"All right, Brother."

"Are we alone? All alone, Dock?"

"Miss Hatcher is here."

"Send her out. Send her out. I can't stand this."

The nurse retired, closed the door, and Dr. Foster leaned over his patient.

"Come closer, Dock, and hurry," begged the man.

Never would the nurse forget the look on Dr. Foster's face, when he rushed into the kitchen where she and Sandy were standing by the range.

"Go to him," urged the physician, "and whatever you do, keep him in bed. Sandy, lend her a hand, if he gets wild."

The doctor was pulling his coat on, and for once his calmness was gone. Like a frightened buck, he bounded toward the darkened mansion, stopping for nothing. His long legs carried him over the wall, and up to the cherry doors. Fiercely and long, he rang the bell, and the three minutes of waiting seemed like a day.

"Foster, Dr. Foster," he called, in answer to the porter's inquiry. Leaping into the hall, white and breathless, he exclaimed:

"Hurry, Weber, get them all up. Call Miss Valkert and tell her for God's sake not to fool time away dressing too much. Call them all!"

As the dazed porter ran upstairs, the doctor sank into the hall divan and shuddered at every lurid flash. Would she never come down! He began to pace the floor, while the thunder rolled closer and louder.

"Miss Valkert!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "For the love of Heaven, hasten."

There was a quick movement above the flight, and down ran Miss Valkert, clad in a silk kimono and long, fur coat. Her marble-white face showed blank wonder, and her eyes were two great interrogation points.

"Quick!" cried Dr. Foster, catching the slender form in his arm and literally swinging her into the whirling tempest. Vaguely conscious of the others following them, he half led, half carried his fair neighbor across the road. Into the Foster house, the whole company rushed, and for what? None save the doctor and his patient knew. Back in the little bare room, where the boys blacked their shoes and settled their disputes, Dr. Foster and his companion stopped, looked at one another, and breathed more slowly.

"Don't be frightened now, Miss Valkert," he began, in something like his natural voice. "The shock will be awful if it comes, but we are safe."

"What—what in the world is it, Doctor?" she asked in a whisper.

"My Heavens! That thunder!" he cried, drawing her closer, as

if in an attempt to shield her. "Your home, your beautiful home!" he said solemnly. "Miss Valkert," his voice sank to a whisper, and his clasp on her hand tightened, "there is an infernal machine under your house. It is wired to the tower lightning rod, and any bolt may blow the mansion to atoms."

She reeled, gasped, and would have fallen but for the arm that sustained her. A deafening peal of thunder seemed to rend the old brick house from end to end. There was a snapping, a rushing noise, and even Dr. Foster trembled. There were cries of alarm, upstairs and down, and above the din, Miss Hatcher's voice was heard calling the doctor.

"Wait here," he requested, and Miss Valkert sank upon the wooden bench near the door. Dr. Foster hastened to the office, where the rest of the party huddled together like so many ghosts. Pale and bewildered, the nurse met him on the threshold.

"He is dead," she whispered. "Actually frightened to death by that crash."

"Well, perhaps it's best that he is. That last bolt sent the east-side elm to the earth. I heard the boys saying so," he added.

One glance at Milroy's rigid countenance was enough for the skilled eyes of the doctor. He sighed deeply and returned to Miss Valkert.

The storm was hardly over, ere Dr. Foster and Sandy, accompanied by the porter, found their way dubiously to the Valkert cellar, where, after a long search, they discovered, behind boxes and barrels, two small wires, pulled through a hole in the wall and connected with a can of explosives buried under one of the large, flat stones. With trembling fingers, Dr. Foster himself cut the deadly lines, and he heaved a deep breath when the porter walked toward the river with the can.

Back in her library, Miss Valkert looked into the dark, grave face of the doctor and murmured:

"How awful it would have been! I—I am so deeply grateful."

They stood there through five silent minutes, reading in each other's eyes all that either of them needed to know.

The Empty Cartridge*

BY HENRY M. HALDEMAN

"PARSON" Edwards had ridden his submissive pinto at an unbroken walk while the sun slipped half across the brassy afternoon sky. The pinto at length slackened its pace and came to a full halt. Its rider gazed ahead uncertainly.

Parson Edwards was not afraid. It was not alone his knowledge of the threat of Blacky Randolph that made him hesitate. Other complications held him deep in thought and fettered his mind with contending doubts. The gun which swung at his hip was cleaned and ready as a matter of habit. Beyond that—the pinto horse knew the way quite as well as did its rider. And the cattle world knew Parson Edwards quite as well as the sheep country knew Blacky Randolph, and each was as ready and as eager as the other to stand behind its convictions.

Gossip had risen to the occasion like sand before a northwest wind. Devoted punchers rose in defense of their colleague's nerve. They refreshed the memory of Parson Edwards, drunk with loss of blood, reeling hatless in his saddle with a blazing pistol in each hand, as he stormed like a devastating wind through an ambush of the hated sheep men to save the day—that day when the League's honor lived, when the Enemy bartered theirs for a chance of victory. Parson Ed was brave. It was his way—mild and modest by habit—and his deep-covered soul, that had earned the epithet. He fitted the range country as he fitted the saddle—he was built for both. His acts were his credentials; his eyes, deep and soft as deepest water-holes, were more than half his speech. The Silence of the plains was his God.

As the pinto halted, Edwards crooked one leg about the saddle pommel and stoically rolled a cigarette. He struck a match on his boot heel and held it up for a moment pensively. The yellow blaze climbed hotly in the dry air. A bobolink fluttered across the sand-bound road, clung for a moment to a dry stem of soap weed, then

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dropped with a disconsolate twitter to the shade of the drouth-curled leaves. The pinto horse chafed its dust-grimed nostrils on its forelegs alternately and bent its head back at the tall rider. Still Edwards sat gazing ahead, where the trail was lost in a shimmering range of chalk buttes. This was the Deadline, the portal to the Spottedtail. Beyond, were the sheep country and the house of "Sheep" Sherman.

Parson Edwards was not afraid. Fear knew no place in his heart. To him the word was a maverick with no place in his world. There had been days when the chalky barrier before him meant no more than a sharp eye and a sure-footed horse when the night was dark. Then the law intervened with its decree that the range of bluffs should divide the warring elements of cattle and sheep; the herds of sheep must keep to their own. Thus peace had been restored.

But no written law could lay the dilemma of Parson Edwards. His was an affair of the heart. Then, too, there was that new hate which had usurped the place of friendship. And Edwards wondered at its mystery, hating in return yet hating the hate which forgot the days before the turn in the trail came.

Blacky Randolph had cast his lot with the sheep men. No breast rankled more bitter than his because of their alleged unjust allotment at the hands of the law. Such treasures as fell within their boundaries Randolph guarded with a jealous eye. These treasures were the rightful heritage of the Spottedtail. He himself claimed the heart and hand of Jessica Sherman, and he brooked no rival, either "sheep" or "cattle." As for Parson Edwards, if he again crossed the Deadline, Randolph swore violent retribution .

Thus in the bar at Flatrock, Randolph had voiced the impetuous words. The threat had gone abroad and there was no retracting. In the valley of the Spottedtail the question was: "Will he come?" As for the cattle country, it knew its man. There the query was simply: "Can Randolph beat him on the 'draw'?"

Parson Edwards returned his foot to the stirrup and spurred toward the bluffs. But the pinto's pace was still the doubtful walk. Vague rumors had come to the rider's ears, rumors which Jessica Sherman alone could answer. If the flower of the basin had surrendered herself to Blacky Randolph, it was hers to say.

Edwards crossed the divide. The sun lowered at his back, fusing the chain of buttes in a deeper and deeper red. The last rays melted the Deadline's crest in a lurid glare; they glanced from the

ridge past the lone horseman, sweeping the contoured basin before him with flitting windrows of light and shade and casting over all the sheep country a dim, ruddy flush like the afterglow of Judgment fires.

The cattleman rode erect, gaze level with the alien range or shifting subconsciously to the pinto's ears, which would first record a sign of life in the evening solitude. Ahead, a solitary clump of cottonwoods, gray-green in the fading rose light, marked the place where the head waters of the Spottedtail bubbled from the earth.

Alert and with quickened footsteps, the pinto, unguided, made his way to the trees. Here Edwards camped. When the new moon was clear-cut in the sky, he pulled up the saddle cinch, remounted, and pursued his way toward the home of Jessica Sherman.

The sluggish rivulet which issued from the place guided him for a mile, when the trail joined a wagon road and crossed the stream among low, abutting rocks. The pinto rounded a jutting shoulder, threw up its head with a low snort, and stopped abruptly.

At the ford, full in the pale moonlight, a horse waited, rigid and watching. A tall figure at its side stood erect. An alert poise showed in the dim shape of a sombrero, one rigid arm was extended to the saddle's pommel.

For a tense moment the two horsemen peered, each at the other; the horses seemed to cringe upon their haunches, the voices of the frogs in the rushes came in a choked medley. Then recognition struggled through the darkness, swift and simultaneous. The man at the ford was Blacky Randolph. An instant Parson Edwards hesitated. Had he a quarrel with this man who—Randolph's free arm made a quick movement and the flare of a pistol lighted up the ford. The pinto reared, plunged from beneath its burden, and whirled toward the up-trail.

The frogs among the rushes sent their wearisome chorus out upon the night and now and then an owl followed the stream with a muffled swish. The moon had drawn near to the hills and a current of air commenced to fan the wisps of dry grass when the prostrate figure on the creek bank stirred.

Edwards sat weakly upright. His bewildered gaze fell upon the pinto standing with lowered head and wondering eyes. He raised one hand to his matted hair and drew it away wet and black. The dim contours reeled and tossed, then grew steady, and Edwards remembered the blinding flash of Randolph's pistol. The fresh-

ening air of night revived him. He looked about, swore softly, and crept to the water's edge. In the cool water he bathed the long, gaping wound in his scalp, and drank long and greedily. Slowly, experimentally at first, he rose unsteadily to his feet. Something fluttered to the hollow of his arm. He caught the object and held it up. It was a dark handkerchief, though not his own.

He recovered the pinto's bridle reins, mounted, crossed the stream, and followed the trail toward the house of Sheep Sherman.

As he came near to the corrals, Edwards pulled the pinto from the hard-packed trail and rode silently across the softer turf. A dark figure near the water tank held his glance. As he came nearer, the horse of Blacky Randolph, with head erect, watching his approach, became discernible. Light from the sod house issued through a single window, and safe beyond its glow the man from the cattle country dismounted. His movements were tense, quiet; his breath was coming hot, a false vigor buoyed him. He forgot his weakness; the wound of Randolph's bullet had sunk to insignificance. The pinto had known the way; unguided as the purpose of its rider, the horse had followed where instinct led.

Edwards paused and looked. Inside was his rival. The room was the kitchen and Jessica Sherman, flushed, bright, and happy, was busied about the stove. Blacky Randolph sat beside the table. He was silent and morose, while the girl turned from time to time and gaily assailed his abstraction. Such was not the habit of the dashing, dark-featured horseman.

The newcomer looked but an instant and had impetuously covered half the distance to the door before he checked himself. "No, no," he murmured, audibly, "not there, not now; and she so bright and ——" The thought broke in his mind; he held himself steadfastly to the spot and looked blankly through the glass. One hand instinctively closed hard again upon his pistol butt. Blood surged, throbbing, to his temples, a hot stream trickled across his cheek and dripped upon his tight-clutched fingers. He turned and strode blindly to the water tank where he again bathed the wound and sucked up great draughts.

His burning thirst satisfied at length, he moved weakly toward Blacky's horse. There, suspended from the saddle pommel, hung Randolph's chaps, cartridge belt, and pistol. The fool! Such reckless audacity was characteristic of Blacky. Without these a man was exempt from hurt as a child.

Edwards stood for a moment pondering; then he absently drew

the holstered pistol from its sheath and threw open the cylinder. Five chambers were clean and loaded. In the sixth, under the hammer, was a blackened, empty cartridge. He swung the cylinder to again with a sudden click and turned the weapon over in his hands curiously. Yes, yes; it was the same gun—the same gun. Edwards had won it in a roping contest when a mere boy. It had been his gift to Blacky in the old days. There in the night, the cattleman scowled darkly. Then he sheathed the pistol slowly, very slowly, and returned deliberately to the window. He was thoughtful now.

Randolph had risen to his feet and was nervously pacing the floor. Edwards moved closer as one fascinated. At times the light fell upon Blacky's features. His jaw was set in stern pain, a pallor was upon his face, and a look of anguish came from his dark eyes.

As the intruder watched, Jessica Sherman turned from the stove and intercepted her lover in one of his turns across the room. He paused, half irritably, and looked down into her face, then away toward the wall. The girl's lips moved as if giving voice to the question in her eyes. Her hands were raised to his shoulders, where they rested a moment, then crept about his neck. Randolph stooped in response to the embrace and——

Edwards turned away. His blood was pounding fiercely again, but not now in his temples. The pang was farther down. He grew sick and returned again unsteadily to the tank. He dropped one arm across Blacky's saddle and hung heavily against the horse.

The big roan turned its head and with a sniff of recognition gently nosed his elbow. The man wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and laid hold of a slicker that was rolled behind the saddle. From its folds he took a leather covered flask and in the trembling haste of weakness raised it to his lips and drank. While the spirits returned a measure of strength to his limbs, he replaced the metal stopper and made a long impassionate scrutiny of the worn and battered object. He had drunk from that flask before. Once in a raging blizzard he had roused from the death sleep to find his head on Randolph's knee with Blacky holding the flask to his lips and swearing fervently while he administered the fiery liquid.

Parson Edwards drank again and, with his arms on the big cattle saddle, he faced the low, rambling soddy. And as he looked the lighted window became a glimmering blur in his eyes. He was again in that blizzard, lashed by the hissing snow, with Blacky bel-

lowing curses in his ear and dragging him on while he fought back with torpid arms and begged for sleep.

The nose of the old roan nuzzling his side roused him. He straightened and glanced about apprehensively. The crescent moon was dropping behind the hills. He again pulled Randolph's pistol from its holster and again threw open the cylinder. He drew the exploded cartridge and rolled it about in his hand. The shine was gone from its surface; its inside was grim, black emptiness. Edwards thumbed the shell from his palm and listened to it whistle off into the night.

From his own weapon he extracted a new cartridge and with it recharged the empty chamber in Randolph's gun—the gun he had given to Blacky. From his pocket he took the handkerchief that Randolph had left spread upon the upturned face in the sand grass. He shut one corner tight in the cylinder, wrapped the free end about the weapon, and replaced the weapon in its holster.

Then Parson Edwards returned to his waiting pinto and gathered up the reins. With hand upon pommel and one foot in the stirrup he paused and looked again toward the window. Blacky had resumed his seat by the table. His head rested in his hands and Jessica Sherman stood beside him combing her fingers through his glossy hair.

The watcher threw himself astride, pulled the rein hard to the right, and rode toward the stream. There the pinto stopped and drank with instinctive providence, then crossed and picked its way to the levels above, which stretched away to the south and where, through the still hours of the night, the rider could listen to the low whispers of the wind in the prairie grass.

Grinless Jones Breaks Silence*

BY WILLIAM H. HAMBY

RINLESS JONES never smiled and seldom spoke. He would sit by the hour tipped back against the wall of our camp cabin, his feet on the second rung of the old split bottom chair, sloughing off layer after layer of silence as thick as Lake Michigan ice. If there is such a thing as a male wall flower, he was a whole wall garden. But he was an artful hand with a skillet, and we could not conceive of our annual camping party with Grinless left out.

At times we all got exasperated at him, and usually about the second day Curly Ward got mad and swore if Grinless did not change expression or break silence he was going to hit his face with an axe. It got on his nerves, Curly said. But, of course, that was an exaggeration, for Curly talked like a borrowed telephone on a party line and laughed like a calliope; and nothing ever got on his nerves except somebody trying to take part in the conversation. Grinless never did that. If we asked him an urgent question, and he was pretty loquacious that morning, after he had fried a couple of skillets of ham, and looked meditatively off into the woods, he would reply, "Yes, I think so." But by that time we had not only forgotten what we asked but who asked it.

"I tell you what I am going to do," Curly paused and nodded decisively. The pause was so unusual that it attracted the attention of all of us. It was the last of November and the six of us had just gotten settled in our Ozark cabin for a month of hunting. "I am going to find out what is the matter with Grinless. There is something preying on that fellow's mind, and it is going to end tragically if we don't get him out of it." Curly spoke with the air of an alienist. "It isn't natural for a human being to go around month after month not averaging fifty words a day and never cracking a smile. Why, that fellow can listen to the funniest story ever told and look as miserable as a cat in a creek."

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We laughed, and Watson suggested that even a pond of ice water was funnier than lots of Curly's jokes.

"But I don't depend on my own," said Curly hotly. "I've sat right in front of him and read to him hour after hour out of Josh Billings and Mark Twain and Bill Nye, and watched him like a hawk, and stopped after each joke and explained it to him, and he just sits there and looks at me like a cat watching a bird and never twitches a muscle.

"I tell you, fellows, it's awful not to have any sense of humor at all, and when you've got a dumb devil besides, it's particularly dangerous. Something has got to be done about it, and I am going to drive Grinless Jones to do one of three things: to smile, to break silence, or to commit suicide."

We reminded Curly of his half dozen other efforts in that line. Curly was always baiting Grinless. He had put a live eel in his bed; set off a cannon fire cracker under his chair; sewed up his coat sleeves; put salt in his coffee. But all of them had fallen sickenly flat, for they had made no more ripple in the silence of Grinless Jones than a fallen duck feather on the surface of a lake.

"I wonder what is the matter with him," speculated Smithson. Grinless had gone to the spring for water. "He does his work well at home; he seems to enjoy, in a way, these camping trips; he does not seem soured on the world. And he has always been that way—doesn't seem to get any worse."

"He couldn't," promptly put in Curly.

"We certainly have done our share to amuse him," remarked Henderson. We laughed over the various funny business we had all tried on Grinless, and for his benefit.

"He is the soberest, silentest man I ever saw," said Watson. "The nearest to him I know is old Chet Gardner, who lives near Doe Run five miles below here. Old Chet does not lack many notches of being eighty; never shaves, never has his hair cut; never laughs, never smiles; and when in active conversation says one short sentence about every two minutes. I've stood in the snow until my feet froze to my boots waiting for him to answer a question."

Saturday afternoon Curly came back to camp as hilarious as a German brass band, carying four kegs of beer. He had killed two wild turkeys and had some news which he could hardly hold down until Grinless went out in the woods to bring in some dry limbs for the supper fire.

"I got him, I got him!" Curly doubled up and slapped his leg most gleefully.

"Got what?" asked Watson. "The cramp colic?"

"No, old Chet Gardner. I got him to promise to come up and stay all night with us, and visit with Grinless." Again he went into spasms. "We'll all sit around the fire and listen to their talk."

It was a funny idea and we joined in the laugh.

"And tomorrow," said Curly, "we'll go off down the hill and leave them in the cabin together." Grinless hunted very little any day, and none at all on Sundays.

Old Chet Gardner came just before supper. He was certainly a queer piece of humanity. His unscissored hair was not so long as it was thick and touseled. His beard was not excessively long, but it, too, was thick and ragged, and tobacco stained. He spoke only once or twice during supper.

After we had gone into the cabin and built a big fire in the old chimney, we got old Chet on one side of the hearth and Grinless on the other, facing each other. The rest of us drew around in a wide circle. Old Chet incessantly smoked a cob pipe with a stem so short the pipe did not miss the end of his nose more than an inch. He carried a lot of long green tobacco crumbs in his coat pocket, and from time to time brought up a small handful, punched it into his pipe, and every few minutes settled it with rapid jabs of his little finger.

We had agreed among ourselves to leave the conversation entirely in the hands of old Chet and Grinless. It nearly killed Curly, but he stuck. There we sat for over an hour with not a word. The old man on one side smoked his pipe with short contented puffs, putting up his hand every minute or two to settle the tobacco with those sharp jabs of his little finger. The young man on the other side sat tilted back, his head comfortably resting against a log, his heels on the second rung, his hands on his knees. Neither spoke.

The silence could not last any longer. Watson broke into a laugh, and the rest joined, and to relieve our spirits we got up and did a clog dance or two and yelled until the roof shook. But through it all Old Chet smoked as undisturbed as an ant hill on a battle field and Grinless looked his serenest.

"Boys," said Curly at breakfast in his blandest tone to the two momuments of stillness, "the rest of us are going hunting this morning, so we can leave you two old cronies together for a good visit—there is so much you want to talk over."

We did not go hunting though. Instead, we slipped off fifty yards down to the south hillside from the cabin, and sunned ourselves in a pile of dry leaves while we listened at the silence.

It was a crisp November day and old Chet and Grinless stayed in the cabin by the fire, but the east door was open, and we could have heard the slightest noise—if there had been any.

We had listened, chuckling under our breath, wondering how long they could sit together without speaking, when we suddenly heard a sound that brought us to our feet. It was a low guttural sound like a hoarse cry, followed by a higher pitched one, as if a man were sobbing.

"Good heavens!" Curly went pale. "We've carried it too far. Grinless has gone crazy and they are choking each other to death."

We started running to the cabin, all feeling apprehensive, for it was a weird sound.

But when we got to the door everything was serene. Grinless sat by the chimney, his back to the wall, as usual, and old Chet was walking round and round the room, puffing his short-stemmed cob pipe. But evidently old Chet was in the midst of an earnest conversation, and we filed in and sat down to listen.

It seemed he was half way with some dramatic recital of personal history, and he was telling it especially to Grinless Jones. He paid no more attention to us than if we had been wooden pins in the wall. He would walk deliberately clear around the room twice, and on the second round he began to puff on his pipe a little faster. Just as he got opposite Grinless' chair, he stopped, pointed his finger at him, and said with vigorous emphasis:

"I'm the oldest white child born in Wahoo County."

Around the room again; puff, puff on the short cob pipe, jab jab with his little finger; once again around, and this time, a slighter pause:

"Except Granny Cail."

Two more rounds. A vigorous shaking of the forefinger at Grinless' nose:

"I've been married three times."

Around the room speculatively; fills pipe as he walks; settles it with little finger; around again; then stops, faces Grinless squarely, and again hammers his forefinger:

"And I didn't have to go three miles from my own door for any one of them."

That was too much for Curly. He ducked for the door, and

one at a time we followed. We rolled on the leaves and laughed until our ribs doubled up.

"My, aren't they enjoying themselves!" exclaimed Watson.

"Ain't the old man talkative though!" said Davis.

But Curly got sober. "Boys, I really am afraid we are carrying it too far. Did you see the look on Grinless' face? His eyes looked positively wild and they followed old Chet around the room as though he was hypnotized. I declare I'm really and truly worried about that fellow. For all of his glumness, I think a lot of Grinless; and if something don't happen 'puff!' one of these times his reason will go and he'll be crazy as a loon.

"I really believe we better get the old man away, for it struck me he was just about driving Grinless to distraction. His eyes looked sort of wild like those of a boy or an animal that is cornered and is desperate."

"Let the old man get down to the tombstone of his third wife" Watson suggested. We did not take much worry from Curly's fear, although we had noticed the peculiar, strained look on Grinless' face.

For half an hour we listened to the thump, thump of old Chet's heavy feet as he went round and round and to the periodic bursts of his heavy voice.

But directly we quit laughing. The regularity of the thing and the intermittent stillness sort of got on our nerves.

"Bang!"

The sharp, cutting crack of the pistol brought every man of us to our feet, and as the smoke curled lazily out of the cabin door, we looked with sudden pale horror into each other's faces.

Then we ran for the cabin, Curly in the lead.

Just inside the door we stopped, frozen with horror.

Grinless sat as we had left him, but in his hand, which rested across his knee, was a revolver, still smoking. Across the cabin lay the old man where he had fallen, face down, his arm thrown over his head. A pool of blood and a spatter of brains told the story.

"For heaven's sake, Grinless, what have you done?" Watson started toward the young man in the chair.

Without the twitch of a muscle in his face, Grinless slowly raised the pistol and pointed it straight at Watson's heart. Watson quickly backed toward the door, and the pistol came down across the knee again.

"He's mad as bedlam," said Watson under his breath. "What will we do?"

"Get the coroner first thing," said Davis. "The body must not be touched until the coroner sees it. It's a bad mess we are in, for the old man is supposed to have a good deal of money, and we have lured him up here,—and now he's murdered."

"Let's cover him up," said Curly, ghastly pale and sick at sight of the corpse.

With his eye on Grinless and talking soothingly to him Curly edged his way into the room to one of the the beds, got a sheet and spread it hastily over the bloody remains. Grinless watched but did not offer to interfere.

Davis had gone to the nearest rural telephone, three miles down the ridge, to call the coroner from the county seat twelve miles away.

Two or three times we tried to coax the demented man to give up the pistol, but to all our pleas he returned not a word; sat as calmly as though nothing had happened; and when any of us ventured too far into the room, up came that gun with such deadly aim that we scarcely breathed until we had backed clear out of the door.

We sat on a log outside the cabin door for four hours, talking under our breath of the double tragedy: the madness of our friend, and the murder of the old man. Curly felt the blame most keenly and the poor fellow was completely unnerved.

The coroner got there about one.

We warned him about Grinless.

"We will chloroform him if we can't get hold of him any other way," said the coroner. He was a doctor and always carried his medicine case with him.

We followed him into the house.

"Mr. Jones," said Watson in his most beguiling tones, "shake hands with our friend, Mr. Notham, of Belmont."

But Grinless was not to be beguiled. Instead of shaking hands, up went that deadly revolver; and the coroner nearly smashed a couple of us getting out of the door.

"We'll make a chink hole in the wall back of him and chloroform him," proposed the coroner.

"Let me try again," said Curly, who was so desperate over the situation that he did not mind much if he was killed.

Again we followed him in, the coroner in the rear.

"What did you do it for, Grinless?" Curly asked in his most pleading tone.

Grinless looked him mildly in the eye and replied promptly: "Just for fun."

A slight noise made every man of us jump. We turned, and as the white sheet rose in the room, Curly gave a mad yell and jumped for the door.

We all started to follow, but checked ourselves at the door.

Old Chet was sitting up, and looking at the bunch said:

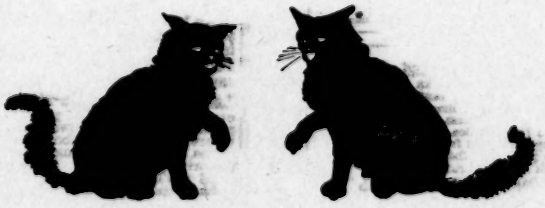
"Wish some of you fellows would get me some water to wash these dadblasted squirrel brains out of my hair."

Then all of a sudden Grinless collapsed on the floor, and old Chet leaned over all doubled up.

We slunk off from the cabin a little ways, while the wildest laughs I ever heard shook the roof.

Curly looked pleadingly from one to the other—no, we were as solemn as he; then, glancing off to the clear sky in the west, he remarked:

"I wonder if it's going to rain."



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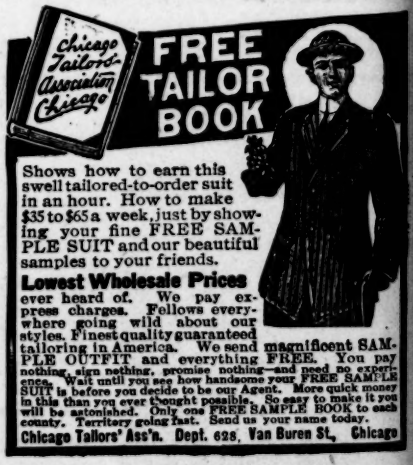

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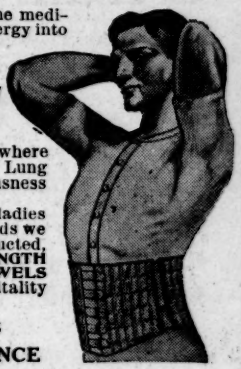

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